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TWO STROKES OF THE BELL

BY

Charles Howard Montague

Boston Mass

W. I. Harris & Co. Publishers

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TWO STROKES OF THE BELL

A Strange Story

BY

CHARLES HOWARD MONTAGUE

BOSTON
W. I. HARRIS & CO.
24 FRANKLIN STREET
1886

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TWO STROKES OF THE BELL.

PART I.—WHO AM I?

CHAPTER I.

MY AWAKENING.

DID the bell strike twice, or was it only an echo out of my long night of visions? Surely it was a belfry clock close at hand striking the hour of two. Surely the sonorous reverberations following the heavy initial clang had not ceased to tremble on the air. Was it possible to mistake for a resonance such as this, the silvery chiming of a tiny timepiece on a chamber shelf? Manifestly I had done so, for there was no belfry in sight, and the little clock on the shelf was plainly visible, its hands pointing to the hour. A sudden transformation of impressions, such as this, fills the mind with momentary fear. I stared hard at the clock. I made an effort to sit up in bed, as if there had been some solution of my late hallucination to be obtained from a closer scrutiny of its expressionless face. The effort made me aware of the fact that I was very weak; I could not lift my head.

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"Put a good face on it, my lad; you will soon be out of it," said a cheerful, reassuring voice—the voice of a man who was standing by my bedside.

My wandering glance rested on his features. They were certainly unfamiliar; they suggested no associations to my awakening consciousness. Yet the face was smiling on me benignly.

"Yes, my friend," he went on, "you will soon be out of it. Speedy fulfilment of a bold prophecy! At half past nine on Saturday, everybody says you are dead. Not at all, I tell them; he is alive; he will get well. At two o'clock on the afternoon of the following Friday, you are almost ready to get up and attend to business."

Why did my ideas become so hopelessly entangled in the effort to follow this simple statement? Why did my eyes neglect his face, to go back to the tiny timepiece on the shelf?

"Did the clock strike?" I asked him. What a disagreeable effort it cost me to speak! From what a distance my voice seemed to come!

"To be sure it did," he replied.

"What hour?"

"Two o'clock."

"It is a very loud clock."

"On the contrary, it is a very soft clock. But you don't want to talk now. Sleep is better for you. Sleep!"

There was little need of this advice. Already the tiny clock on the shelf had become shadowy and of

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uncertain outline. Even as he spoke the scene faded out.

Another season of feverish, uneasy visions, and it came again. A trifling alteration had taken place in the details. My unknown friend was no longer standing; he was seated at the bedside. The hands of the little clock betrayed the lapse of several hours — or was it days?

"Feel stronger, don't you?" queried the cheerful voice, and the face wore the same encouraging smile.

"Much stronger, thank you."

"That is good. I knew it would be so. I was sure of it. Your enterprising city of New York hasn't *all* the medical skill of the country. There is some left, even in Bromberg. Your friends will say as much, I dare say, when they see you. Hadn't I better write to them to come at once?"

"My — my friends?" I know the words escaped me as if I had no sense of their meaning. I was at first aware only of a curious mental paralysis. I made a great effort to start the sluggish rivers of thought in their wonted channels. I brought all my intellectual resources to bear upon the proposition presented to me. Who were my friends? For the matter of that, who was I? I tried hard to recollect. Vague doubt deepened into positive terror when my mental vision encountered only profound darkness. Merciful heaven! had the link been severed which bound me to the past? Had I come alive out of a terrible sickness with all my faculties intact save one? Could it be possible for a man to

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understand, to know, to suffer, to reason, and not to remember? Could the mind wake while one of its fundamental principles slumbered?

Yes; for here was I, after an agony of effort, sinking, fainting, exhausted, under the poignant consciousness of my own awful dispossession — a knowledge as certain as that of the man who wakes after an operation in the hospital to find himself without his wounded member.

My friends since have told me, no; physicians have told me, no; it could not have been thus. My recollection is at fault, they say. Such a realization of my condition as I have endeavored to present did not come to me all at once in the dawn of my awakening; it must have been a slow process, a blind, unrealizing inquiry, like that of one groping in his sleep for something whose loss he feels but cannot understand, culminating at last in self-knowledge more or less complete.

I should be the last to attempt, with my slight comprehension of metaphysics, to dispute the conclusions of these learned mental analysts, did I not retain a most distinct and vivid recollection of the horror of these first moments of my awakening in the chamber at Bromberg. Unlike the child who opens his eyes upon a world absolutely new to him, this second birth of mine was the birth of a man with all that that fact implies. A child's mind is a blank page written over, perhaps, in invisible ink with the individual tendencies which are his by inheritance, and which circumstances and education are to bring

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out in after life with varying distinctness. When a man is born, as I was, his ideas have been classified already by experience, and the sight of his surroundings awakens in him impressions such as belong only to the matured intellect. An ocean of thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and sentiments was springing to life within me, though the special train of circumstances that had given rise to them was for the time, at least, hidden behind an impenetrable veil.

Such a realization, I say, wholly or in great part, was the result of the simple suggestion of the stranger at my bedside that my friends should be notified of my situation.

I think my distress was so apparent that he noticed it, for he said:

"Oh, there is no hurry about it! Don't think of it if it troubles you. You will feel better by and by."

"Are you sure?" There was so much excitement and anxiety in my tone and manner that it could not fail to arouse the wonder of so keen an observer as the man at my bedside evidently was. His answer was designed partly to reassure me, partly to draw from me an explanation.

"Of course I am. Why do you doubt it?"

"Where am I?"

"In the upper front left-hand chamber of my house at Bromberg, county of ——, State of New York, United States of America."

"How did I come here?"

"You were brought here by two teamsters who found you lying by the side of the road some half

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a mile out of town. I don't know how you got where they found you. We were only able to trace you to the nearest railroad station, to which point you had come by rail. Previous to that time you have the advantage of the good people of this neighborhood."

"You are——"

"Dr. Boodleby, physician and surgeon, you understand. That is why they brought you here, these honest teamsters I speak of. They might easily have robbed you and left you where they found you. You had quite a sum of money in your pocket, you remember. Don't worry about that. It is safe. These men were possessed, you see, of more than average honesty and lacked the average stupidity. Instead of taking it for granted that you were dead, as they might conscientiously have done from your appearance, and carrying you up the street to the undertaker's, they concluded at least to give you a chance, and left you in the hands of the leading medical light of Northern New York—for all of which you are to be duly grateful. If you are ever tempted to doubt your luck, you want to recollect that it stood by you in a very serious crisis of your life. I happened to be at home when those teamsters rang the door-bell. When you reflect on this, and on the further fact that Frisby's is only three doors below, and that Frisby is very devoted to his profession and buries everybody he can get his hands on, you will recognize the narrowness of your escape and thank God—if it is your custom to express your gratitude in that way."

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All this was said with a voluble good-nature and an encouraging smile that revealed in a moment what manner of man my new friend was. But the laudable effort to put me in a cheerful frame of mind was a wasted effort. The physician did not dream how my thought, with almost abnormal activity, darted between the lines of his speech, seized upon the startling facts of the situation, to fall back with frantic attempt against the closed door of recollection in a despairing endeavor to discover the secret of my own identity.

I could not reply; I could ask no further questions; I understood it all. I could only lie still and stare into the ruddy, good-humored face beside me, in a ghastly fashion, I doubt not. His expressive countenance gradually assumed a troubled look.

"You don't want to worry about anything, you know. You are going to get well very fast. If you have neglected to do anything that is important, anything that I can attend to, or cause to be attended to, perhaps you had better mention it and have it off your mind, Mr. Lewis."

Lewis! How familiar the name sounded! What a confused jumble of ideas and associations seemed to spring up within me as I heard it! Before he said it, I doubt whether I could have told my name; yet, somehow, I recognized it instinctively. I knew that the doctor had pronounced my family name. This and no more; not another clear and well-defined ray of light penetrated into the darkened chambers of my memory.

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"You see I know your name," the physician continued. "At least, I suppose it is your name?" He waited for me to reply. I inclined my head slightly.

"I was sure of it. You see we were obliged, under the circumstances, to take the otherwise unpardonable liberty of looking through the papers in your pocket, with the intent of course of getting the address, if possible, of your relatives or friends. Unfortunately, we were not successful. We found the name Ansel Lewis stamped in the leather of your pocket-book and as the superscription of an envelope. We wrote a letter to that address, but nobody seems at liberty to open your mail in your absence."

I was in a fever of impatience before he had finished.

"Bring me the papers," I murmured. Truly I must have been very sick. Despite the activity of my mind, my limbs responded reluctantly to my will, and my voice, which I had thought to make strong and imperative, scarcely rose above a whisper. Nevertheless, the doctor understood me. I saw a cloud gather on his face. He did not approve.

"To-morrow will be time enough for that," he said. "We won't trouble ourselves with business to-day. Besides, there is nothing important among your papers."

"The letter," I whispered, "the letter!"

"Here, take this," said the doctor, pouring something from a little vial into a spoon which he held to my lips; "take this, and I will get them."

. . . . . .

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When the doctor made this promise, the rays of the setting sun were dancing on the wall opposite the western windows of my chamber. When I saw him again with understanding eyes the golden shimmer had gone; but the sun was shining brightly elsewhere and the room was full of the redolent, fresh air of a cool summer morning. The doctor, as if he had not moved, was standing in the same spot.

"You slept splendidly last night, Mr. Lewis," he said.

"Have you brought the letter?"

He seemed astonished by my question.

"Why, haven't you thought at all since yesterday?" he exclaimed. "It was sixteen hours ago when we were talking about your papers."

"Was it, doctor?"

Then I realized, what before I had known, as we say, mechanically, that a night had intervened. And here I was, feeling so much stronger and better that I seemed like a new being! Even my voice was clear and steady. Stronger and better; and yet no nearer the solution of that strangest of strange questions that a sane man ever asked himself, — Who am I?

I noticed a mirror opposite my bed. I made a sudden effort to rise, that I might look upon the reflection of my own face. The doctor was watching me curiously. He seemed to understand.

"You want to look at yourself?" he queried. "Well, you haven't lost any of your good looks, my

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young friend, which you will not recover, though you do seem a trifle ragged at present. Want to see yourself? Well, you may."

He brought the mirror and stood holding it horizontally above my head.

The face of a sharp-featured, pale young man, with bright steel-gray eyes, and black curly hair straying over the temples — a face somewhat emaciated and pallid, but recognizable. I knew it was recognizable, for I recognized it. Not the face of a stranger, — a familiar face, — my *own* face. No doubt about it. If I could have embraced that intangible reflection I think the impulse in my heart, born of relief and joy, would have caused me to do so. I drew a deep sigh.

"Nothing to sigh about, my young friend," said the doctor, replacing the mirror. "You're not disfigured, you see, and the girls will be just as fond of you as ever in a month."

"What — what should you say my age was?" I faltered. The doctor answered promptly:

"Twenty-five. I'll risk my reputation on that guess. Now, how near did I come to it?"

A quickly deepening sense of my affliction almost wrung a betraying cry from me.

"The letter!" I cried. "Where is the letter? Get me at once every document that could possibly lead to my identification."

A curious, sharp glance searched my face for an instant, and then the doctor turned to obey me. In a few minutes he came back.

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"I am very sorry to have been obliged even to glance at your private papers, Mr. Lewis," he said. "Of course you understand. I have not read them except for the purpose mentioned. But as I have read them once, I suppose it will do no additional harm to read them again — if that is what you want. You had better not try."

"Read them to me," I said impatiently. "I don't care who reads them. I must have them read — every scrap, every line."

Again the physician glanced at me and with more concern than before.

"Everything that would lead to your identification, I think you said?"

"Everything in writing that could have any possible bearing on me or on my life."

"There is very little, Mr. Lewis, I am sorry to say — sorry, because I should have liked to notify your friends. First, there is the name stamped on the pocket-book, as I told you. In the pocket-book are two unreceipted bills for furniture to the amount of $1,700. They are both by the same firm, Frill & Tucker, Broadway, New York. Then here is a check drawn on the First National Bank to your order, signed Benjamin Crooke — your uncle, I presume?"

I said nothing. The name was familiar to me. It did not awaken a single association in my mind. I could only say, I am sure that I have heard this name many times. The physician went on:

"Then the only other contents of the pocket-book

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are four twenty-dollar bank-notes and this letter. The superscription reads —

MR. ANSEL LEWIS,
WINTERSIDE,
LONG ISLAND, N. Y.

It is postmarked New York, and it contains this letter —

'NEW YORK, August 6.

'MY DEAR NEPHEW — Are you afraid of me? I don't like this letter-writing. Say what you have to say to my face when you meet me every day. What do you mean by asking my permission? Do you mean to insinuate that I am a notional, vacillating old man, who does not know his own mind? Has my life been such as to lead you to think that I am one thing to-day and another to-morrow? Never, *never*, NEVER write me another letter like the one just received. You ask my permission! You surprise me! Here is a man about to blow his brains out, and he asks his uncle's permission! Go and do it if you will, but do not ask my consent. If, after you have tried the experiment, you live to repent it, it will not be in my house or at my expense. Remember that. So far as I have authority to speak, I reply to your inquiry, no, NO, NO. I say love is a dream, and every woman has her price. You say this woman has none. *Have you tried her?* Do so. If she pretends not to have, then put away this bosh and go abroad. Go to Europe. Spend two years in Paris. I will guarantee a cure. Or, if you prefer, stay at home, be a lunatic, embitter the balance of my days, and ruin your own prospects. This is a candid answer to a foolish letter.

'I remain yours to command, on condition only of your sane behavior, BENJ. CROOKE.'

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"That is the contents of the pocket-book," continued the physician. "But there is one other thing. In your side coat pocket we found this note, written, as you see, on brown paper, without date or signature. Perhaps you don't care to have me read it. Yes? Then here it is:

'Let a friend warn you that the woman who is probably dearer to you than anybody else in the world is threatened with a danger that requires prompt attention. Let her alone a week, and I would not give much for her chances. Don't believe what is told you, or what *appears*, but investigate for yourself; and, most of all, don't tell anybody that you have received this note, if you wish to retain the friendship of the writer, who, though an humble individual, is not to be despised.'

"I believe," said the physician, "that that completes the documents in the case."

"What is the date of the first letter?" I questioned, unable to conceal the trembling in my voice or the agitation of my features.

"August the sixth."

"What day and month is it now?"

"September the fourth."

"You say you wrote?"

"I did. I wrote to Benjamin Crooke, New York, and also to your own address on Long Island."

"There have been no answers?"

"No answer—as yet. But, my young friend, you are taking something too much to heart. Don't despair now; don't despair. If your uncle is not

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behaving right, or anything else has gone wrong, depend upon it, it's not so bad that you can't straighten it out. He'll come round at last; these rich old uncles always do. There — there — don't break down now; don't cry——"

I interrupted him with a wail of anguish.

"God have mercy on me, sir! I do not know what one word means that you have read. I do not know. I cannot think. My memory is completely gone."

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CHAPTER II.

MY FLIGHT.

THE good Dr. Boodleby had prophesied that my recovery would be rapid. He was right, and he was wrong. Right, because my physical strength returned; the color came back into my face, the vigor to my limbs; because I regained the power to go about, to mingle in society, to sustain deep thought connectedly, to read, to converse, to write, to perform the thousand other customs of daily life. Wrong, because in spite of this, not even the feeblest ray of light shone into my darkened past to comfort or reassure me. They tell me that I did not suffer because I could not realize! How little they know the powers and resources of that eternal mystery, the mind! A man without a memory — a dull, detached item of humanity, floating in the narrow current of the present, unable to appreciate his loss, because without memory there is nothing with which to contrast the sensations of to-day. How very logical it seems, and yet how unlike the truth of my experience!

Never, in all my life, have I been more keenly sensitive to my condition than I was in the first days of my returning strength, in the chamber at Brom-

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berg. Never have I felt more bitterly, suffered more acutely, the torture of self-doubt. Memory,—definite memory,—the memory that could respond to my volition and bring to my mind a scene, an event, that I had known before my sickness, seemed absolutely dead; but its place was not a void. There was never absent a vague but no less certain sense of *something* back of all. In the moment of my awakening I knew that the world was old; that life was familiar; that I had lived and suffered before. The face of nature smiled upon me like that of an intimate friend. There was nothing strange about the sunlight or the breezes. The ways and manners of men were a lesson well learned. When I took up a book to read, the words on its pages were just as potent for grief or joy as if my mind had been actively conscious of all the ills and pleasures of existence. I knew what it was to love; I knew what it was to suffer; yet not one special revelation of love or of suffering could my ceaseless introspection rescue from the grave wherein my old, forgotten self was buried.

How many times I re-read the two brief scraps of writing that appealed to me out of my unknown past, like strange voices out of the darkness of the night, it would be idle to attempt to say. Every morning when I awoke, my mind took up the hopeless struggle which it had abandoned through sheer weariness the night before, beating itself against the bars of its prison. At night I am sure I dreamed of the old sights and the old sounds. Once I awoke with a

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name on my lips, with the lingering sense of a familiar presence. What name? What presence? Real as they seemed in the vague, unreasoning web of my dreams, they vanished like thin smoke before the logic of a clearer consciousness. One thing alone I knew, — knew it with increasing certainty when each succeeding twelve hours brought the test before me and gave me a sudden, painful, indescribable impression, almost a shock, — some time in my old life I had heard the clock strike two; some time when the sound meant much to me; when it had filled me with a terror from which I had not even now escaped. I came, therefore, to watch the hands on the clock face by day, to *feel* them describing their silent circumference by night. Not that I always lay awake to do so, but the two strokes never failed to startle me out of the deepest slumber.

Does this seem like a morbid fancy akin to madness? I only know that to me it was a plain and necessary reality. It was the one tangible link that seemed to connect me with my former self, and I would not have parted with it for the world. So passed the early days and nights of my convalescence.

One day Dr. Boodleby came to me with an expression of relief and satisfaction on his genial face. The letter which he had forwarded to Benjamin Crooke had been answered. It was a cold, formal note, written upon the paper of a New York legal firm, and signed by the name of the senior member. It told us, in a word, that the delay in answering the letter had been occasioned by the death of Mr. Ben-

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jamin Crooke; that any news of his missing nephew, Mr. Ansel Lewis, would be important, if true, inasmuch as he was heir to the entire Crooke property; and that a messenger would be despatched at once by the firm to Bromberg to identify the patient in Dr. Boodleby's charge.

To say that I was filled with hope and excitement by this news is to make a cold statement of a burning fact. But my physician proceeded at once to subdue my elation by discouraging but sensible advice. He reminded me of his previous statements, that mine was not an unusual instance of the effect on the memory of a serious fever, and that the return to vigor of my dormant faculties was only a question of time. For this reason, it would be extremely injudicious to set afloat stories which might be detrimental to my future by making a confidant of the messenger from the lawyers. His earnest advice was that I should refrain from asking him questions about my past.

The result was that the chief outcome of my brief interview with the messenger the next day was to plunge me still deeper into despair. The man recognized me, beyond all question, but his face was to me the face of a stranger. When the door had closed upon him, I sank into a chair and weakly gave way to tears.

The next time I saw Dr. Boodleby, he looked at me very gravely, and shook his head in a manner which might have been designed either to discourage or to reprove me.

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To my nervous inquiry, "What have you discovered?" he answered:

"Nothing. The lawyer's man was as uncommunicative as the famous bivalve. But, oh, my dear young man, I am afraid you have been sowing your wild oats with a free hand!"

"This man must have dropped some hints, then?"

"He did, strong ones. He said that it was a pity about you, — that a young man, with so strong innate vicious propensities as yourself, should have had a sympathizer and an encourager in your only legal guardian; meaning, I inferred, your uncle. Don't let me prejudice you against him. He didn't use this language. He was very quiet and conservative. But it's my way to be blunt. If the legal light had had my way, that's how he would have stated it."

"In what direction did these vicious propensities of mine manifest themselves?" I ventured to ask.

"He was not definite, but I took him to mean too much of the Byronic elements — wine and women. Nobody would take me for a preacher, Mr. Lewis. I am a practical man, not given to theoretical moralizing, but in my profession I have seen serious results from both the seductive sources I have mentioned. If this man has told the truth, this fortune of yours may prove a very bad thing."

"I have no interest in the fortune," I said with great bitterness. "It has failed to awaken in me anything but the most horrible distrust and anxiety. My past, my forgotten past! It may have been reckless, misspent, but it was mine." My heart was

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full when I spoke. I made no effort to conceal my emotion. The physician could not help seeing it, but he went on resolutely:

"Then what I was going to say would sound unkind, very. I was about to remark that in case this man told the truth, your present misfortune may prove a lesson that will be good for you. At any rate, it's a first-rate place to start in new. Think of that when you come to yourself. It isn't what's right, my young friend, that I am making the outcome of this sermon, but what's wise. Youth is inconsiderate and hasty. It seizes the biggest plum, though it has to crawl out on a very frail branch to get it. You want to consider ultimate consequences and weigh results in this world. That's my morality."

There was something so serious and earnest about Dr. Boodleby's manner that I have since been tempted to suspect that the man from New York told him more than he was willing to repeat

But not then. My impatient thoughts were leaping forward to a possibility of the near future. I hardly heard his kindly meant advice.

"How soon shall I be able to go to New York, doctor?" I asked.

"Oh, you must not begin to think about any such thing for two weeks yet!"

"So long as that!" I exclaimed.

"Certainly. It would not be prudent, judicious, or safe for you to undertake the journey before. If you consult your own welfare, you will make up

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your mind to wait here patiently till I say go, if it should be a month."

Frightful possibility! Endure these torturing doubts and fears, remain not only in ignorance of myself, but ignorant of whether the scenes of my former life were potent enough to bring myself back to me, for a whole month, when a single week seemed to have condensed into it the mental suffering of a lifetime!

I said nothing, but when the good doctor had left me, I gave myself up to a passion of discontent and irritation. The more I thought upon it, the more my impatience grew. I was young; my strength seemed returning in full force. I felt within me the quickening pulse of new health and vigor. A journey of a few hours lay between me and all that I had lost, and here I was shut up like a wild beast in a cage to be let out at the discretion of my keepers. How long could I endure it?

This doctor is a good man, even an experienced man, I said to myself, but he does not, he cannot appreciate my situation. He does not know the constant torment in my soul. He does not know how persistently my mind dwells upon the morbid side of my disease, how it exaggerates the symptoms and horrifies itself by the dark picture of a dreadful issue. He does not know how I listen for the striking of that hour which is so mysteriously connected with the unremembered time, how I wait for it by day, how it wakes me out of my sleep at night! Men have lost their reason for less than this!

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And so my thoughts tormented me. That night my slumber was broken and fitful. I crept to the window, softly raised the sash and exposed myself to the worst of dangers by putting my head out into the chilly, still air of the night to hear the town clocks strike two. I had counted the clocks often. I knew just their number. I knew well the individuality of the bells. How wild they sounded in the silent place! One after another they rang out. One, two. One, two. One, two. Not together, irregular, discordant, and every one found an echo in my heart. Then, with a shiver, I crept back to my bed again; but not to sleep. To go over the old unanswerable enigma, striving for its solution from every point of view; to imagine circumstances and situations in the vain hope of hitting upon the real ones of my past life, and so to arouse associations which would bring it all back to me; to toss about, to count the hours, to give up at last in despair; to sink into a fantastic dream in which my identity gradually seemed to become absorbed in that of an immense church bell, swinging in darkness high up above the world and striking the hour of two at certain intervals with a portentous clangor that sent a shudder of dread through every living thing.

The morning came, but with it came no relief, no freedom from the haunting terrors of the night. The doctor shook his head when he saw me. Everything discouraged me. I could not, would not endure it longer. I resolved at any hazard to go to New York. I knew the doctor would never consent to what

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seemed an almost suicidal act, and I determined to accomplish it without his knowledge.

Having arrived at this decision I breathed freer; I felt much more easy in my mind. It was the terrible sense of inaction that had so distressed me. Now that I had come to the resolution to really do something, was actually setting out to do it, the fever left me. I became calm, collected, cautious. I even lay down upon the bed and fell into a refreshing slumber from which I awoke with an exaggerated sense of my own powers of endurance. Profound excitement stimulated me; I had no thought of weariness. I proceeded very quietly with my plan. I procured pen and paper. I wrote a long, friendly letter to Dr. Boodleby, announcing my determination, thanking him for all he had done for me, and exonerating him from any blame that might attach to the rash step I was resolved to take. I enclosed in this letter most of the money I had found in my pocket-book, reserving for myself only so much as I thought necessary to purchase a first-class passage to the city. This letter I sealed and directed and placed in a position where it would readily be seen after my departure. To do all this I had to elude the vigilance of an elderly sister of the physician, who had been and was still my nurse. Favorably to my project, the good lady suspected nothing. She was obliged to divide her attention between me and her household duties, and the thought that it was necessary to watch me never entered her head. I found everything I wanted to know about the trains from the

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newspapers in my room. The most convenient for my purpose stopped at the Bromberg station at eight o'clock in the evening. This would bring me, without change of cars, into New York before noon the next day. I made up my mind to take it.

The most difficult part of my scheme, so it seemed to me, was getting from my room to the station. There were a thousand little incidents possible to occur which would bring all my plans to grief; but fate willed it that nothing should arise to deter me from my wild project. All circumstances conspired to assist me. And so, when everybody thought me safe in bed, I stole forth like an escaping criminal, and skulking in the shadow as much as possible along the streets, I inquired my way to the railroad station. I was conscious of no fatigue after my half-hour's walk in the brisk night air, but as I sat in the station, having purchased my ticket and my sleeping section to my destination, the noise, the lights, the confusion made me dizzy. For a moment I was afraid that I should faint, but an effort of the will restored me. It would never do to fall down at the very outset of the undertaking, and I was resolved to go through to the end, if it killed me.

Events after that were never very clear to me. From the moment of the faintness in the waiting-room I seemed to enter into a sort of dream-like state. I was unconscious of deep thought or emotions. I took part in events from a mechanical impulse, as though I had been a puppet, and some one outside had pulled the strings that made me go.

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Scenes had a far-off, unreal appearance. I remember the roar of the coming train; finding myself in the throng that was passing into the cars; showing my tickets to the conductor; being assisted to undress myself; a rumble in my ears and a dull feeling in my head; and standing at last, amid the whirl, the shouts, and confusion, beneath the full light of the day in the city streets.

When I came to myself, in a degree, I discovered that I was adrift in the midst of a pushing, bustling crowd of humanity. Where had I been? How came I here? Whither was I going? Surely these streets, these buildings, were familiar to me! Surely I was following a course that I had often traversed before! Surely but a moment since I had a vague idea of going somewhere, — somewhere very different from the office of the lawyer whose address I had on a card in my pocket, which I had intended to hand to a hackman at the depot. Surely a moment ago there was the image of a face before me, — a fair face, — the face of a woman. How weak and tremulous I was! Why, I was reeling like a drunken man! I stopped and steadied myself against a building. People eyed me with a smile. Undoubtedly they thought me intoxicated. I passed my hand across my brow. I was bareheaded. How strange! I felt as if I had just awakened from a long dream — a dream of weeks.

A sudden horror of myself and my situation seized me. I made a great effort to regain my self-possession. I was so very weak I seemed about to fall

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down. I looked around for a passing cab. And then the impression came over me again stronger than ever. My surroundings, these buildings, this locality, seemed very natural to me. Just below me a street crossed the main avenue at right angles; I knew that street; I was positive of it. I caught the courage of excitement and hope. I staggered on. I came to the street. I turned the corner. God be praised! a light was breaking in upon me; I recognized these substantial edifices of stone and brick; they were like familiar faces to me. And here, just beyond me, near at hand, *that* house! I knew it better than all the rest. My tottering feet reached the bottom of the steps; my trembling hand was grasping the iron railing; I was dragging myself up the stone staircase; I was pushing at the door. It resisted me. Aware of no thought to guide me, I was feeling mechanically in my pocket for a key. I found it. It fitted the lock. The heavy portal yielded. I was passing through the vestibule. I saw the richly carpeted hall, the small bronze statue in the corner, the pictures on the wall, the stairs before me leading up, — all, all things that I had known and looked upon many, many times before.

I caught at the baluster, and stood for a moment clinging there with all my failing strength, lest I should sink down exhausted. Resolution rallied my powers. Again I was dragging my feet, which felt like lead, up the broad stairs to the floor above. I was in the upper hall. There was a door before me

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that I had opened often in the forgotten past. I opened it now. A strange scene burst upon my view. I remained on the threshold looking at it with a dull, uncomprehending vision. I lacked the force to take another step.

It was a luxurious room, and it contained four people, — two men and two women. I scarcely noticed the men, save that one was old and the other young. One of the women, whose face I could not see, was lying prone upon the floor. The other was young, and of brilliant and fascinating appearance. She, with the two men, made up a startled group about the motionless figure. My sudden advent seemed to make a profound impression upon all three. There was an instant in which the three pale faces stared at me as if they had been the faces of statues. Then, with a swift movement, the old man seized by the edges the cloth that covered a little table which stood in the middle of the room, and, dragging it off, unmindful of the lamp and the various fragile articles of bric-a-brac that went crashing down and were strewn in fragments about the carpet, threw it over the face and shoulders of the fallen woman. But even that strange action was incapable of arousing in me a sense of astonishment. I scarcely saw the deed. All my little remaining understanding was enthralled by the sight of the woman who stood up looking at me. She had turned so white in the first instant of my coming, that the lace about her neck seemed almost yellow in contrast. And now she uttered my name in a voice that did not

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rise above a whisper, and yet how distinctly I heard it!

"Ansel Lewis!"

She was a beautiful woman. It seemed as if I must have known her all my life, and yet I could not call out her name in return. Her face brought back no associations, no memory of the past. It was only a familiar countenance looking at me out of the darkness of the darkest night.

I tried to speak. I could not. The room swam round. I felt myself falling. The scene went out.

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CHAPTER III.

MY FRIEND SIDONIE.

GRADUALLY I became aware that I was lying in bed, looking out into a room. There was nobody in the room, but I could see, between the folds of the heavy curtains looped back, two people in the adjoining apartment. They were the brilliant young woman and the old man. I lay still for a long time watching them intently. It was a very much quieter picture than that which had burst upon my view when I opened the door on the second floor of the familiar house in the familiar street, though whether that event had happened this same day, the day before, or a month ago, I had not the remotest idea. The young woman, with writing materials before her, was seated at the table, to which the covering had been restored, and the old man stood opposite, apparently conversing with her by means of the deaf and dumb alphabet. He was an odd little old man with very bright eyes, white hair, an unwrinkled, fresh-looking skin, and a singular expression of countenance. He was very small, and had a stoop which made him look smaller. There was about the woman an air of dashing abandon which I am at a loss how to translate into words.

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She was a perfect blonde, with a voluptuous mouth, and placid blue eyes, concealing a latent fire. Her toilet had been prepared with the minutest care, notwithstanding its simplicity. The loose white morning-robe, with its light blue ribbons, and its dainty lace-work, was the one perfect garment to make her seem most attractive. There was a suggestion of design even in the apparently accidental arrangement of the straying ringlets of her auburn hair. And yet, I think, if I had been forced to make an estimate of her character from what I saw of her at that moment, I should have hesitated to say that she belonged wholly to the emotional rather than to the intellectual class of womankind.

But it was no critical or intelligent study of her face that engaged me then. When the heart throbs with strong emotions, and the mind is divided between the most awful doubts and the most entrancing hopes, one does not become an analyst. I was only making a desperate appeal, then, to my still unresponsive memory, to tell me who she was and what she had been to me. I knew that I had passed many hours in this house in her society. Beyond that, everything was confused and indistinct. Was it love that brought me here? She seemed made for sighs, soft utterances, and caresses, and yet I was not sure whether I admired her or feared her most. This fact was the more curious, from the further fact that I entertained the most decided opinion about the old man. He was repugnant to me.

I thought she was pale. I thought he trembled,

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and that his glance was nervous and apprehensive. I tried to understand what they were communicating to each other. I knew the deaf and dumb alphabet. I knew that I knew it when I turned my attention to the matter, just as I had recognized, without an effort, the significance of the characters on the printed page in the first days of my convalescence at Bromberg. And they were not employing the ordinary alphabet. Not by any means. On the contrary, it was a very peculiar system of dots and spaces, made by tapping the forefinger of the right hand upon the fingers and thumb of the left, and they used it with wonderful swiftness. Whether or not it was more difficult to learn than the ordinary method of voiceless speech, they had evidently mastered it. I could only watch helplessly the rapid motion of their fingers. I could gain nothing more, except that his hands were slight and delicate, and hers a model of beauty. Then I fell to following intently the varying expression of her face. There was some slight encouragement for me here, because her lips mechanically took the form of the words she was seeking to convey to him. Perhaps I should have been able, after a time, to grasp the drift of her ideas, but the opportunity was not given to me. In the course of her conversation she nodded her head, as if to indicate me. His eyes involuntarily turned in my direction. He must have seen that mine were open. He seemed startled; he made a swift gesture toward me, and stepped back out of sight.

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She arose at once and for a moment stood looking at me, pressing as I thought rather heavily against the table as if she lacked the strength to stand unsupported. If this was so it was a merely momentary matter, for she immediately began to approach me. I say *began* to approach, for she came very slowly indeed, either constrained by reluctance or fear. Her eyes searched my face all the time with a gaze of doubt and solicitude. My expression must have reassured her, for her final steps were impulsive. She seized my hand and kissed it.

"*Mon cher, cher ami!*" she exclaimed in a tremulous voice. "Mon Ansel! He gets well! He opens his eyes!"

I cannot say what manner of look she saw in my face, but it seemed to trouble her. She suddenly released my hand and shrank back a little with an air half fearful, half dangerous.

"You reproach me, you? You welcome me not? You want me to go away? *Eh bien!* I will go." She waited for some reply, and then went on reproachfully and with an injured air.

"I have nurse you, *moi*. Still I make no protestation of that which I have done. I have been surprise that you come here, but to myself I said, he forgives me. I might nurse you, sick. When you are no longer sick, you think different of it, eh?"

She stopped again and tapped her foot nervously upon the floor with a little, petulant insinuation of "well, why don't you say something?"

My heart was bursting with the agony of its mel-

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ancholy secret. I felt that if I spoke I should cry out.

"Not one word for Sidonie?" she said again with an air of resignation, — "for Sidonie who you have spoken words of loave, who you have sworn *fidélité éternelle. Tout est fini!* You will not forget!"

Then my feelings could no longer restrain themselves. I shed tears. See looked almost incredulous.

"*Vous pleurez!*" she cried. "*Est-il possible? Pourquoi donc?*"

"Can you not see?" I said. "My sickness has taken all the man out of me. I remember your face; I know that you are Sidonie — yes, Sidonie Lamonte — because I heard you say the name. But all of the rest is gone. It is like a cloud. I could not tell my own history to save my life. I cannot say where I met you, how long I have known you. My past is blank!"

She stared into my face with wide-open eyes, amazed, incredulous.

Then she dropped suddenly into a chair by my bedside, uttering a solitary ejaculation:

"*Mon Dieu!*"

For a long time her steady gaze did not waver, and as the minutes passed I saw, or imagined that I saw, a pallor creeping slowly into her face. It almost seemed as if it were excitement that caused it all, the breath went and came between the parted red lips so quickly. After a while she spoke, but in a slow, hesitating way that was quite mechanical.

"Your oncle dies when you are gone, and me — I

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am so distress about you! So is the faithful Tum —J. Tum, which you don't like."

I had an inspiration. My face must have lighted up with joy at the coming of a ray of memory. I could not help crying out:

"Oh! I remember! Tum is your servant!"

Much as I detested the old man, I could have embraced him at that moment. Sidonie seemed bewildered. After a long pause she faltered:

"I think — you — tell me — a lie."

I made no effort to renew my assurances, but the sense of the dreadful helplessness and desolation of my situation was so keen in me at that moment that it must have shown itself in my countenance. I saw her suspicions failing as she looked at me.

"*Non! non!*" she exclaimed, "I will not doubt you, no. *C'est tout vrai! Pauvre Ansel!*"

There was genuine sympathy in the tone in which were uttered the last two words. She drew her chair close to me and took my hand again.

"You have been sick a long time," she said. "The doctors they worry; they sometimes shake their head. Monsieur Wayne he have been here *toujours*, almost *toujours*. He shake *his* head and look sad. Nobody else know you are here — only J. Tum and me. Monsieur Wayne he must be inform and so I send J. Tum to him right away, *tout de suite*."

"Help me," I whispered; "help me to remember. How did I meet you? Where?"

"*C'est très drôle!*" she exclaimed, laughing and trembling. "He asks me to tell him his own story!"

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"In a few words," I pleaded. "It may bring it all back to me."

She looked at me with a slight, momentary frown, and then said: "It is all very simple, this story of you and me. It goes back just one little year ago. I was at the theatre and you saw me. Then I got bouquets, and billet-doux, and remembrances. I am painting the designs for Monsieur Prang and othairs, making but a living indifferent at my profession. I am such a stranger I hardly speak the English, but you teach me much. Then your oncle, Monsieur Crooke, he hear about me, and he say to you, you are ver much in love with me, and he urge you to take this suite that we may come here."

"And then?"

"And then? *Eh bien*, we come, did me not? You do not like Tum, — J. Tum; but I have taken that *pauvre* old man through charity for his great infirmity. He run errands, show visitors, call carriages, *bref* — everything; but we have no othair quarrel, you and me, till——" She paused, and looked at me apprehensively again.

"Till what?" I asked, breathlessly, my mind whirling in the vortex of a confusion in which awakening memories seemed to have no part.

"Till you go away and leaf me."

"I cannot remember," I said. "I do not remember going away. Why did I go?"

"Why? *Pourquoi?* That ees what *I* say."

"Did I give no reason?"

"You say nothing; you only go. Nobody hear

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anything from you; nobody know where you are — not even Monsieur Crooke. Monsieur Crooke write here; Monsieur Crooke come here, — 'Where is my nephew?' All no good. You — you are nowhere."

"Sidonie," I said tremulously, "did I marry you?"

Sidonie answered softly, averting her eyes: "You would marry me; but your oncle, Monsieur Crooke, he make grande objection. He say pooh! to all law, that oncle. Monsieur Crooke, he have a great head. A philosopher, that one. Not much like othair American men. He have a theory that the state have nothing to do with the marriage. He say you loave, that is enough. More is bad. No marriage, no divorce. Was he not right, indeed? You are too strict here. The soul have its affinity. That is nobody's business but ourself. Is it not so?"

"I remember now," I said, almost sure that I spoke the truth. "I remember now. I never married you."

She pursed up her lips into a little pout.

"Why, no," she said. "*Pourquoi?* There was no need."

Sidonie was fast regaining her color. There was a soft flush in either cheek, and a vivacious sparkle in the eyes. Brilliant, fascinating, dangerous! — Sidonie was all of these. She was beginning to smile upon me again, as I knew she had often smiled upon me before.

All at once there was a curious episode. A little French clock very near to us gave out two musical chimes. I could not conceal the tremor which the

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striking of the hour caused in me. But the knowledge of my own mysterious trepidation sank into insignificance beside the remarkable fact — so pronounced that it could not escape my observation — that Sidonie experienced a similar emotion. The flush quickly vanished from her cheeks; an indescribable expression came into her face. For a moment she looked at me with all her former apprehension.

"Tell me," I exclaimed, "when have I heard the clock strike like that? What is there about it that always gives me the same strange feeling?"

She looked at me and away from me, frowned and laughed.

"I see you feel not well," she said. "You would not say those silly things. You must have hear the clock make two most every day these five-and-twenty year."

"But you seemed to notice the same thing yourself," I persisted.

"I? *Ma foi!* That is all a mistake about me on your part. I know nothing that you mean at all — not in the least."

And all this time Sidonie had not spoken of the strange scene I had surprised when I burst into the room on my arrival from Bromberg. Perhaps she thought I had forgotten it. But I had not. It troubled me now far more than it had in the benumbed, half-understanding moments when I was beholding it. And yet I refrained from questioning her.

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CHAPTER IV.

MY FRIEND WAYNE.

I PUT out my hand, with a glad cry, to welcome the young man at my bedside. The sentiments which Sidonie had excited in me only confused me and filled me with uncertainty and doubt. There was no uncertainty about the place which this man had occupied in my life and in my heart. He was my friend, tried, proven, true. What did it matter that I could not recollect the circumstances of our friendship, that I did not know where I had met him nor how long I had known him? My whole soul rose up to welcome him, and bid me weep for joy at the sight of his familiar face. I was told of his coming before I saw him, so that it needed no miracle of memory to remind me that the name of this, my nearest of personal friends, was Mr. Sylvester Wayne. He was about my own age, perhaps a little older. His was the frankest of frank, sunshiny faces, incapable of a harsh expression; and his clear blue eyes had a whole-souled, honest look about them that led even strangers to confide in him. When he came into the room a breath of fresh air, a patch of blue sky, and a whole field of sweet flowers seemed to come with him, — a great deal more than

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his recent exposure to the keen autumn atmosphere, the unmixed color of his eyes, or the fragrant blossom in his buttonhole could possibly account for.

"By all the powers of good, my dear boy!" he cried, wringing my hand with an ardor that ignored my weak condition, "you will outlive every one of us yet! You are doing just what I told the doctors you would do, — getting well as fast as the Lord will let you. They were bound to be dubious over it; bound to put on long faces about it, you know. Why, bless you, I said to them, you don't know that man's constitution; you don't know where he gets it. I do, and you mark my word it will pull him through anything. And I knew what I was talking about. How do you feel?"

"I don't know," I said, feebly, "how do I look?"

"Splendidly," he exclaimed, with the utmost enthusiasm. "Splendidly! I wouldn't have believed a man could change so for the better in the short space of twenty-four hours. You'll be as robust in two months as you were on the very best day of your life. These fevers and things are good for a man once in a while; they carry all the bad blood out of his system, and help build up his constitution. And if you can't keep in good health after this, with three hundred thousand in your own right, and accountable to nobody for what use you make of your time, why you won't deserve to. It was terrible, the way the old gentleman went off, though, wasn't it? I tell you I didn't mind what little ill-feeling — never of my own seeking, you know — there was

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between us. I went right down there and offered my little services. And to think that after all my trouble, the lawyers, through the stupidity of that sublimely idiotic agent who went down to Bromberg to see you, never told me anything about you till after he had got back. Of course, I went to Bromberg on the next train, but when I got there you had gone. Old Dr. Boodleby is a complete gentleman. You can't imagine how bad he felt about your going away. If it hadn't been that his business made the trip next to impossible, he would have come to New York with me to help hunt you up. Perhaps I wasn't worried a little myself when I got back and you hadn't been heard from. In complete keeping with my customary brilliancy, I never thought of coming here till Sidonie sent Tum to my rooms. Does this chatter of mine make you tired? If it does, say the word, and I'll become as silent as old Tum himself."

I was almost frightened at the suggestion. "No, no," I said. "Go on, I beg of you. I am quite strong."

"My dear fellow, I have been in great distress about you," Wayne continued, lowering his voice so that Sidonie, who was in the adjoining room, could not hear him, "in great distress — to put it mildly. When I got your letter I posted back from Baltimore at once, only to find that nobody knew anything about you. You had been down to Winterside to look after your uncle's property there, — some mortgage business, I understand; I don't know what ex-

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actly, — and you had come back and gone, no one could tell where. But I won't worry you about it. When you get ready you'll tell me the whole story, I suppose."

He looked unmistakably anxious.

"The letter — I wrote you," I faltered. "Have you got it?"

"Why, no," he returned. "I thought best, under the circumstances, to burn it. Why, what's the matter? You look disappointed."

"I—I hoped it would bring back my memory," I stammered. "I had forgotten that I wrote it."

"Forgotten it?" he repeated, very much puzzled. "That's a little odd. Never mind; I destroyed the letter, but I remember the contents well enough."

"Repeat it to me," I pleaded.

"It began with one of your familiar phrases, and went on, as I remember it, pretty nearly word for word: 'When are you coming home? I am in great trouble. For the first time since I have known you, I have been keeping a very grave secret from you. I feel that your advice in the most important crisis of my life would be worth everything to me. I do not want to hurry you, but I should so like to see your cheerful face again.' That is about all there was, I think. I am sure. It was the brevity not more than the nature of the note that alarmed me. I knew the trouble must be serious."

"Serious or light, Sylvester, God only knows!" I cried, my overwrought feelings finding their usual relief in a flood of tears. "It is all a blank to me. I do not know when or why I wrote this to you."

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And then I poured forth the story of my woe; the calamity, my fears, my misery; I told him everything. Wayne, for a long time, seemed incapable of comprehending or believing me. When he did, he was too much overcome to make any immediate reply. He put out his hand in a bewildered way and took mine, and I lay in my bed clinging to it as if it had been the last hope I had in the world. I watched his face in an agony of suspense. It seemed to me that if he should be discouraged, I must bid good by to hope. But discouragement was not one of his failings. He went into his fit of benumbment somewhat discomfited, but he came out of it as buoyant as ever.

"My dear boy," he said, with all possible earnestness and sincerity, "you've got a powerful magnifying-glass turned upon this matter. The idea of a man who isn't well enough to get out of bed talking about his lack of memory. It's preposterous! I don't see but that you remember me and — Well, you are simple! If your memory has failed you, how did you find your way *here?*"

"God only knows; I found myself at the door and I came in."

"Indeed! Who brought you to the door?"

"I must have walked," I faltered; "I do not know how I got there."

"Oh, but I do!" cried Wayne, triumphantly; "*you knew the way.* And I tell you, you'll find you know all the rest of it when you come to get up and go about."

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"Are you sure of it?"

"Sure! Why, I'm as certain of it as I am of my own existence. It's all your gloomy imagination. You know how often I have warned you against it."

"No; I do *not* know," I broke out, with increased despair. "I do *not* know; I only know when I am told, and then in but a numb, dull way. In God's name tell me who I am, and what my life has been!"

"My dear boy, wouldn't it be better for you to rest first?"

"Now! now!" I demanded, vehemently. "Rest will not come; it is denied me. Tell me now."

"It is such a ridiculous and preposterous thing," said Wayne; "and it is so useless, too, because you know, it will all come to you in the morning. But you *will* have your own way, I suppose. The idea of telling a man his own history! If you begin that way, how will you end? You'll be asking me in a day or two to take you out and introduce you to your friends, and how deuced awkward that would be! But, here goes. If you had attained the dignity of a place in the encyclopædia, it would begin something like this: Ansel Lewis, celebrated good fellow, born in a small town in Massachusetts. Father killed in the war; mother died when he was ten years old. Brought up by Dr. Senegal, a good, old-fashioned Baptist parson, in a small place near Albany — at least so I have heard you say. Meanwhile, your mother's brother, Mr. Benjamin Crooke, was in Europe. After your mother's death he took formal charge of you, inasmuch as he sent over

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directions that you should be prepared for college at his expense. When he came back to New York, the first thing he did was to remove you from the care of the minister. He hated ministers on principle, and he was afraid that this man would make a milksop of you. You were then fifteen years old. He placed you at a school in New York, and afterwards sent you to Harvard University, from which you graduated three years ago. At the college you met me. I don't know what you saw in me, I am sure; I was about as opposite from you as anybody could well be. I suppose there is some reason in the application of the electrical principle to character, that opposite poles attract, and like repel. The only apparent bond of sympathy between us was that we both had rich uncles who were extremely interested in us. But my uncle was as different from yours as I could imagine. Mine wanted to make a literary man of me; yours was determined that you should become an anarchist. It was the dream of my uncle's life to see my name on the front page of some clever book; whether prose or poetry, it didn't make a copper's difference to him. He was sure I had the requisite talent to make a success in any field of writing. In an incautious moment, in my early boyhood, I had perpetrated something that wore the outward semblance of verse, and that settled it, — I was born a genius. Hence the college; hence my present luxurious apartments in New York; hence the heavy weight of rejected manuscripts that encumber the drawers

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of my writing-desk, — except that 'Story of the Devil,' which was published at my own expense, and so delighted the dear old gentleman that he had a rush of blood to the head, which came pretty near bringing my literary career to an abrupt termination.

"Without attempting to settle the difficult question of the relative degree of lunacy in the schemes of my uncle and yours, I don't think anybody would deny that, bad as my fate was, yours was worse. If your uncle had begun with you, or if you had not been yourself, it might have been different; but that Baptist parson was working in you, and your father and mother and the rest of your ancestors were working in you, and all pulling against the old gentleman. Well, you were a young man, and the things the old gentleman told you were such as are generally pleasant for young men to believe. The old gentleman said to you, 'Go in and be happy. Here is plenty of money; so long as you spend it in making things hum, why I don't care how fast you go through with it.' I do not think poor old Crooke was ever more delighted than when you called on him for a fresh supply, and he had reason to suspect that you wanted it for some wicked extravagance which an ordinarily minded guardian would have looked upon with suspicion, if not with absolute horror. The old gentleman thoroughly believed that all government was an outrage, and that the rights of the individual to do what he pleased, so long as he did not injure other people, was the only right in the world. He believed

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that humanity had been abused and trampled upon for ages, and he fairly swelled with indignation whenever he got to talking about it; and, as he was always talking about it, he was in a state of chronic swell. He believed thoroughly in reforming the world by aggressive measures, and he set an example in his own life by living, as near as he knew how, up to his own principles. And you were to be the one great experiment which was to demonstrate to everybody the wholesome virtues and the practicality of the Crooke theories.

"Poor old gentleman! He married in early life a woman who turned out bad and, after making him the most miserable of men, ran away and left him. That embittered him against all womankind, and from that time to the day of his death he affected an utter disbelief in the integrity of the sex. Of all the civil and religious institutions of this world, he held marriage in the greatest contempt and abhorrence, and it came to be the one terror of his life that you would be led away by what he called boyish imprudence. The one great and only good fruit of these badly digested notions was that, I believe, it prevented you from marrying Sidonie. Tired and disgusted with what you, in your frequent and increasing hours of despondency called your frivolous follies, and the chief effect of which in you seemed to be to make you gloomy and morose, you sought a refuge in this girl, whose antecedents nobody ever was able to trace; and if it had not been for the old gentleman's prompt interference and secret conferences with Sidonie, the

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import of which none of us were afterwards successful in discovering, I believe, upon my soul, you would have married her! Not that I blame Sidonie," Wayne hastened to add. "I don't want you to think I mean to say one word against her, poor thing! She is just like everybody else, what the law of heredity and the influence of her surroundings have made her. But you weren't in love. You were fascinated and attracted; perhaps, it wouldn't be unjust if I used the word 'ensnared.' And the event proved clearly enough that you would have been insane to have made her your wife.

"Poor old Crooke! He was subject to the most tremendous fits of passion, and he died of apoplexy, just as I predicted he would die, one morning in his library when you were away. The old gentleman took an intense dislike to me because I felt obliged to write to him once when I saw how things were going. I told him frankly that you were not the sort of person to serve the purposes of his experiment; that instead of making you happy, he had, so far, succeeded in making you extremely miserable. I would not have dared to have addressed him in this way, I suppose, if I had not been really alarmed about you. That was just before you met Sidonie. You were so gloomy, despondent, and utterly miserable, that I really was afraid that you might make away with yourself, if something was not done. To the outward world you were the same careless, selfish, supremely indifferent person you had always been, but to me your heart was an open book. I alone

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knew all about it, and it was a terrible responsibility. To take such a young man as you were and bring him up behind a moral and religious barrier, and then suddenly knock the barrier down and drive him out of the enclosure, make fun of his scruples, laugh at his half-formed convictions, show him the fallacy of his religious hopes, — why, it is a dangerous experiment, old fellow, and it is wonderful that you came out of it as well as you did. The great trouble is, that men cannot be made to order; they are born. And that was one of those things that old Crooke never could seem to understand. Not that I want to be understood as blaming him, either. I would as soon think of blaming this chair I am sitting in for being a chair, as of blaming Uncle Crooke for not thinking as other people thought. Nobody is to blame, confound it! There are a few spots on the sun, but we'll have our light just the same. Let's be charitable, I say. The thing is all over, and you'll make a good affair out of life yet. Now, my dear boy, don't tell me that you do not understand one word I am talking about, because I don't believe it. I know you do."

Could I say that I did or that I did not? As he talked on in his brisk, cheerful fashion, my mind seemed to become a phantasmagora of indistinct images and sentiments. I was conscious of no definite, positive memories, but I did become aware of a feeling of despondency and hopelessness; and I somehow understood that it was the shadow of my past creeping over me. To have struggled so hard to have

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reached such a wretched result ought to have discouraged me, but it did not.

"You will find some papers in the pocket-book in my coat," I said. "Bring them to me."

He brought them and read them again at my bedside, as Dr. Boodleby had once read them in the chamber at Bromberg. After he had finished, his face wore as blank and helpless an expression as it was possible for such a countenance as his to assume.

"What do you think of them?" I asked him. "What do they mean?"

"Well, they do not mean anything to *me*, that is very plain," Wayne answered. "This volcanic letter from your uncle bears all the ear-marks of the old gentleman. I should know who wrote it, if the name was not signed. It is evidently a reply to something you wrote him. If you cannot remember what that something was, I do not see how you can expect anybody to tell you, now that he is dead. As for the other, the anonymous letter, I should say, judging from its character, that it was not intended for you at all. It has no possible reference to anything in your life."

I asked him then to question Sidonie about it. When he had done so, he told me that her opinion did not differ from his own; she knew of no circumstances in my life to which either of these communications could apply.

It was of no use to inquire further. For the time, at least, I must be content with this. I must lie still and wait for the coming of that day of revelation

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which everybody assured me was near at hand. Already my keen impatience was waning; I began to dread a something unknown; I began to fear that when I knew all, I should know too much. I might have forgotten this vague undercurrent of mistrust, had it not been that twice in every twenty-four hours I heard the clock strike two.

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CHAPTER V.

ECHOES OF MY PAST.

I MUST pass over very rapidly the events of my second convalescence. I was in a weak, variable condition, full of whims and fancies, inconsistent and illogical to the last degree. When I think of it all, I can only marvel at my friend Wayne's patience and forbearance. At one moment I found myself on the pinnacle of hope the next, I was plunged in the bottomless pit of despair. The hope arose from the undoubted fact that my memory was slowly returning to me; the despair came partly by reason of the tantalizing and ominous fact that these distinct scenes and experiences of my former life were all confined to my childhood and early manhood, and partly by reason of the despondent spirit of my unhappy past, which at times stole over me with most incredible poignancy. I make this assertion distinctly, that the *impression* of the sentiments and feelings that were mine in the period that was dark to me, in every case, preceded any special *recollection* of actual occurrences. My uncertain footsteps as I groped my way in this cloudy region were guided and encouraged by the indefatigable Wayne, who, by every means at his command, sought to clear up the mystery, the existence of which

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his active and logical mind undoubtedly recognized much more keenly than my own. One day he appeared before me with a bit of paper in his hand.

"I spent my night trying to chase this coon of ours into his corner," he explained. "But somehow the nature of the woods is decidedly in his favor. This is the best I can do at the present sitting, and I believe I've consulted everybody who could possibly throw any light on the subject. To be sure we don't forget any of it, I have written down the dates and the leading facts for future reference. Between us we can bring up all the important events of your life, with tolerable certainty, to the first day of last July. On that day, I left New York for Baltimore to transact some business with my uncle, who had sent for me. I parted from you at the depot; you were then in your normal condition of health and spirits; which means that your health was reasonably good and your spirits not unusually low. I find, then, that you went down to Winterside to settle some mortgage business for your uncle. You were back and forth between your uncle's rooms and that place for the next two weeks; but you certainly were in your full intellectual vigor at that time, for you transacted your business with promptness and efficiency. But I have noted here one unaccountable fact. Though you must have had a good deal of leisure on your hands during this period, you never came to this house after July third, till you stumbled up the stairs, after your sickness, on the thirteenth of this September. Sidonie is positive that you never sent her any

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reason for this, and that she never heard a word from you during the interval. Now, let's see what you were doing. I find that on the sixteenth of July you got your last signature to your papers at Winterside, and left that place, substantially for good. Nobody there has heard anything from you since, except the postmaster, who says you called twice for letters. Then you sleep at your uncle's house for six or seven nights, and spend your days the Lord only knows where. I shall put the detectives on to the matter if you think best; but I don't see how there is any other way of finding out. About the twenty-fourth of July you left your uncle's house, and, as near as it is possible to discover, you two never saw each other again. Furthermore, it is clear that he could have known nothing of your whereabouts, because he came here to Sidonie twice to inquire about you. The next thing that I can learn of you, you are found by the teamsters on the road at Bromberg, August twenty-third. Now, the only thing in my possession which could throw any possible light upon your conduct in the mean time is that letter which your uncle wrote you on the sixth of August. If I could tell what that letter meant I would give something; but how am I going to find out? It looks decidedly as if you had committed the unpardonable crime of asking your uncle's consent to marry; and when I consider that, in connection with the letter you wrote me announcing that you had been keeping a secret from me, why, it begins to look as if there really was a young lady whose existence I never

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knew anything about. But, if so, what has become of the young lady? I guess we shall have to leave that question for you to answer when you get well enough. I dare say you'll recollect all about it in a day or two."

But the day or two elapsed, and I recollected nothing. After a time I began to understand that there was a fixed limit to the powers of my returning memory. Gradually it became evident to me that there must be an extensive period of my life — reaching back many weeks previous to my awakening — which was an absolute night into whose darkness not even the feeblest ray of light had ever penetrated. I saw, at last, that the confused mass of ideas and sensations, which had made me aware in the first place of the loss I had suffered, had no connection with this time. There were months of my life, in short, which could be summed up in just one awful word — NOTHING; months that I never could have missed but for the logical statement which Wayne had submitted to me. Because I was told, and for no other reason, I realized that this was true. I cannot say that I grieved very much over my loss at this time. There was in my past so little that I could dwell upon without a feeling of repugnance or dissatisfaction, that when it again became familiar to me I made haste to take up my attention with other matters, in order to forget it.

Meanwhile, I saw very much of Sidonie, and once in a while caught a glimpse of the man with the fantastic name — J. Tum. My aversion for the deaf and dumb old man was not one jot abated by the

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fact that I could give no reason for it. As for Sidonie, I confess my sentiments about her were sometimes contradictory and puzzling. She was a curious, erratic, unfathomable creature. It was the one interesting privilege of my convalescence to lie and watch her when she thought me asleep. I soon discovered much about her habits. She was fond of champagne and good living, but her only dissipation seemed to be of a literary nature. She was a voracious reader of French novels. To satisfy her unbounded appetite for these creations, she must have ransacked the foreign bookstores of the city. J. Tum brought her a fresh armful every day, and before she went to bed she would flit through the pages of them all with a velocity that made my head ache. She was subject to the most extreme fits of elation and depression, but with me she was always the same — half fearful, half tender. I should have been dull indeed if I had not perceived that she was really very fond of me.

It was quite needless to question myself as to whether this sentiment was mutual: decidedly it was not. Sometimes I fancied I was glad to have her near me; the next minute I felt it a relief to see her go; but of one thing I was very sure, — if I had ever loved her, that love was dead. Frequently I thought of the good doctor's advice at Bromberg, and his significant remark that if I had been living an unworthy life, this was a very "good place to start in new." In a burst of determination I would make up my mind to leave all my old associations behind me, and see if I couldn't get something better out of

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life; and then the hour would come when I could not convince myself that it was really worth while.

One day, while the resolution was on me, I said to Wayne, who was alone with me: "My dear friend, can't you take me away from this place? Why can I not go to your rooms for a time?"

"Why, I should be delighted to have you, old boy," he said. "But would it not be a little ungracious, after all the care that Sidonie has taken of you, to have yourself lifted up bodily and carried out of the house before you are really able to go?"

I could not help seeing that he was right, and I told him so; but we agreed that it would be better that I should make the proposed change as soon as I was fairly well. I desired to be as just to her as it was possible to be, and I directed Wayne, to whom I had intrusted the settlement of my uncle's estate, to take steps for securing to her a fixed income for life.

I am positive that Sidonie was not in the house when I had this conversation with Wayne; J. Tum might have been. But when I saw Sidonie again, I was very sure some important matter had seriously disturbed her. I knew that Wayne, to whose excellent discretion I had delegated the delicate mission, could not yet have spoken. It therefore greatly surprised me to find her weeping over me and kissing my hand, and saying foolish things in her pretty French way. I was more surprised still when she whispered a secret to me, — a secret which, delightful as it seemed to her, filled me with the direst dismay

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and alarm. I began to see that my separation from her was not such a plain and simple matter as I had believed. I desired to escape from my past, but my past would not let me go.

Wayne saw at once, when he came again, that something had happened to disturb me, but to his anxious questions I made evasive answers. I could only request him to postpone making any further motion in the matter of the income, till I notified him to proceed. This evidence of a vacillating purpose did not astonish him as much as it might have done if I had not shown myself exceedingly whimsical throughout the protracted period of my convalescence.

"Then I suppose I must be prepared to hear you say you won't go home with me?" he said.

"Oh, yes!" I answered quickly. "I have not changed my mind, except that I think it would be well to let affairs remain as at present for a little while; I want time to reflect. Meanwhile, I will go home with you as soon as you will take me."

Sidonie was very angry at my going, as I knew she would be. When she was told of it, her blue eyes wore for a moment a very tigerish lustre, but her mood soon changed to a softer one, and it ended in a flood of tears.

However, Wayne was not to be moved. He had taken the affair in charge, and he promptly saw it through. I was removed to his comfortable apartments in Forty-second Street. For many days I was kept very quiet and saw nothing of Sidonie. Almost

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every afternoon Wayne bundled me up and took me out for a drive. I became strong very rapidly.

It was during one of these drives that an event, which in some respects I must consider the strangest in my life, occurred. We had reached a remote and quiet part of the great city, a place where the rows of brick and stone houses terminated abruptly and the green fields commenced. We were passing slowly through a street, one side of which only was built upon, when I became aware of a curious impression. I say it was curious because it was indescribable. It was a certain, a most intense sense of familiarity, very much resembling that occasional feeling which some people have upon going into a place new to them, that they once knew it very well. In the same way I knew that this street and the houses on it, and, more than all, the peculiar prospect it commanded, had once been known to me. I glanced along the uniform fronts of the tall brick houses till my eye stopped with no uncertain gaze at one of them, and when the carriage had come nearly opposite to it I laid my hand upon Wayne's arm and said:

"Stop here!"

Wonderingly he drew up his horses in front of the building. Obedient to an unreasoning impulse, I stepped out upon the sidewalk.

"In the name of reason, what are you going to do?" Wayne asked me.

I pointed up the brown-stone steps to the door whereon a placard was displayed bearing the inscription: "Apartment to be Let." As if that had

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been enough, I turned to ascend the steps. In another moment Wayne was at my side, holding me by the sleeve.

"What do you want to do?"

"I want to go in there."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"But, my dear fellow," he said nervously, "don't you see how unreasonable you are? Now hadn't you better get right back into the carriage and ——"

But I had drawn away from him. I was not exactly responsible for what I did at that time. I doubt if I should be able to reproduce this scene if I had not talked it over with Wayne many times since. It ended in my friend's yielding to my extraordinary whim, calling a boy to hold the horses, and darting up the steps after me. I encountered a most unforeseen obstacle when I found the door locked. I could not seem to comprehend that fact, and stood looking at it in a daze. The quick-witted Wayne might have seized the opportunity to divert me from my purpose, but he had now become curious to see what I would do. He rang the bell. The summons was answered by a little girl, who piped in a shrill voice:

"Would you like to see the rooms?" and followed the question by the information that they were on the third floor and that we might go right up.

Inasmuch as I had already pushed by the child, and was ascending the stairs, Wayne made haste to answer her question in the affirmative. The outer door to the unoccupied chambers on the third floor

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was open. There was a woman inside, who appeared to be dusting the rooms. This woman seemed to take our presence there as a matter of course, and paid no apparent attention to us.

It was a pretty suite of rooms, commanding from the front windows a good view of the open country with a patch of water in the distance, and looking out at the rear upon the back wall of a church. I knew it was a church, because the base of the steeple was just visible from a corner of one of the apartments. In a helpless, confused mood I wandered through these untenanted chambers, the furniture in which was as new and well kept as if it had never been in use. I sat down at last at a table which stood in one of the rear rooms. Wayne tells me I looked ghastly. I felt like one who dreams. I seemed to be sitting in a familiar place,—familiar, yet horrible too. It was not a pleasant dream. It was a nightmare. I placed my elbows on the table, rested my head upon my hands, and stared at vacancy. How long I remained in this way, I do not know. It was so long that my friend became thoroughly frightened; he came and placed a gentle hand upon my shoulder.

"Come, Ansel," he said, authoritatively. "I cannot allow this. I'm your physician, you know."

My voice, when I answered him, was full of the hush of an expectancy which I felt within me.

"Not yet — not yet! Wait — I will go with you soon — very soon."

"What are you waiting for?"

"I don't know."

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"But, my dear fellow, you *must* come with me now."

"Hush! — wait — it is coming. It is almost here."

I spoke with such profound conviction that he began to tremble and actually glanced around him, apprehensively. Nothing to be seen but the woman busy with her dusting, and furtively watching us out of the corner of her eyes. All at once there was a crash, a brief pause, and then a second. I say it was a crash, because it came with such force of concussion that it made the windows rattle in their sashes as heavy blows would have done; but it was only the great bell in the adjoining steeple striking the hour of two.

I came to myself with a start and stood up trembling.

"What are we doing here?" I questioned, helplessly. "Let me go home." A feeling of sickness came over me; if my friend had not caught me I should have fallen. It was with difficulty that he got me into the carriage, and he was obliged to support me to the end of the journey.

In a week I was almost ready to believe this episode a dream, when one morning Wayne startled me by asking me if I remembered it. The reason for his question followed immediately.

"I only wanted to tell you, if you did remember it," he said, "that I felt impelled to institute a little investigation; if there was any logic in this freak I wanted to know it. But there could have been none. The house has only been open a short time, and that suite of rooms never has had but one

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occupant; his name was Howland. Is the name familiar to you?"

I could not say.

"I thought not. There is little possibility that you were ever in the place before you went there with me. I tell you this as a cautionary matter, for your future guidance. They already have the story implicitly believed from basement to roof in that house that it was visited last week by a lunatic and his keeper. If you cannot help having these whimsical fancies, you can certainly avoid giving way to them. If you are not anxious to be thought a madman, you must avoid the appearance of one."

I felt that he was right. I was ashamed of what I had done. Nevertheless, I knew in my inner consciousness that, if the same unnamable something impelled me, I should have no more power over the results than on that mysterious occasion to which he referred.

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PART II. — WHO IS SHE?

CHAPTER I.

WE MEET.

"WAYNE! Wayne! Look, there! there on the bridge, — who is that woman?"

My startled friend followed my gaze and became at once even more moved than the unusual character of my exclamations warranted. He affected an indifference which he did not feel as he replied:

"Which woman? There are two."

"The younger one; the one with the blue veil on her hat; the one who is looking into the water, not the one who is looking this way."

"Why did you put your question in such a sensational form?"

"I don't know."

"Did you ever see her before?"

"I don't know; it seems as if I must have known her as I know you. It isn't that either, quite; I can't express it, — the face *thrills* me."

"The face thrills you!" echoed Wayne. "How absurdly romantic you are! I thought you had done with this sort of thing."

I had thought so myself, but the new impression

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was altogether too powerful to be ignored or frowned away. It was Sunday afternoon, — a June day in October, as I remember it. The soft breeze that whirled the red leaves about our feet seemed to whisper a gentle apology to the forlorn branches for being so out of season. We were strolling along a winding walk in Central Park when the bridge suddenly appeared before us, rising above the level of the roadway and spanning the stream in a graceful arch. The face which had so strongly affected me that it made me momentarily faint was pale, earnest, and tinged with a plaintive melancholy. This woman had suffered, but the face had a rare, peculiar charm that could not be obscured by the finger-marks of suffering. Like Sidonie, she was a blonde, but utterly unlike her in every one of the important characteristics which go to make up the individual presence. Great brown eyes, golden hair, fair white skin. Not a doll's face, but a face that could touch your heart or make you tremble. If Sidonie seemed to have been made for sighs and soft caresses, this still younger woman seemed born for the deeper love that could live without them; to be brave, to suffer by herself and alone, finding her strength and her support in her own serene consciousness of right. As a stranger, coming upon this sweet, sad girl looking out dreamily across the water, I might have been pardoned for feeling a tender, romantic interest in her. As it was, I believed my strange emotions had some far deeper cause.

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Wayne made a moment's curious scrutiny of my face, and then he said:

"I'm greatly obliged to you, Lewis, for mentioning this matter. I shall show you just what your so-called *impressions* are worth. It is a rare chance to capture one of your fantastic whims on the spot, pin it down to the bare bosom of cold fact and see how it looks there. I happen to know this girl. We'll soon see if she knows you."

He quickened his pace. I saw that the sharp eyes of the elderly woman were fixed upon us. The object of my unaccountable fancies had not seen us at all. I saw the elderly woman speak to her. I was almost sure that the girl started and began to tremble. At any rate, the elderly woman put her arm about her, and they both turned and hurried across the bridge away from us. Wayne looked after them in astonishment.

"Why, what's all this?" he exclaimed. "Miss Mowry must have seen us; they seem to be running away. It will be a desperate race, then, for I'm bound to be at the bottom of this."

Almost dragging me along, he hurried after the two women. His haste was needless.

After crossing the bridge, the young woman began to totter, and was only sustained by the arm of her companion, sinking, finally, upon a rustic seat at the side of the road. At first I thought she had fainted, but her weakness did not reach that crisis. The elderly woman hovered over her and attempted to fan her face with her handkerchief, but in the very

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midst of this action the sufferer drew down her veil. Then Wayne and myself came up.

Wayne took off his hat politely and inquired in a tone of great concern if anything was the trouble.

"She seemed to be taken faint like on the bridge," the elderly woman replied.

"It is nothing, Mr. Wayne," said a trembling little voice which thrilled me deeper than the loudest trumpet could have done. "I have not been feeling quite well for several days. I think the water made me dizzy."

"Miss Bueford, allow me to introduce my friend, Mr. Ansel Lewis."

I could hardly see her face through the veil, but I felt that it had assumed a death-like expression. I could not return her distant salutation by even a formal bow. I stood staring at her with a cold face and trembling nerves.

"I don't know but this formality is entirely useless," Wayne contiuued. "Mr. Lewis was strangely positive that he had met you somewhere before, though he could not for his life say where. I suppose, it is not impossible that you have met?"

Miss Bueford immediately pronounced, in a voice which had become in a short time wonderfully clear and steady, the single word: "Never!"

There was so much unnecessary emphasis about it that Wayne spoke of it afterwards. "I don't know what there was in your appearance that prejudiced her against you," he said, "but she seemed indignant that I could have imagined such a possibility."

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"Pardon me, Miss Bueford," I said, with extreme diffidence. "There is some excuse for me. I have been sick. I was sure that I remembered you."

"Thank you," she returned distantly. "It is very kind of you to think that you remembered *me*. I had forgotten *you*."

"Then you did know him once," Wayne insisted, forgetting his politeness, in his determination to prove or disprove the truth of my presentiment.

"Never!" said Miss Bueford again, almost angrily. Wayne apologized and desisted.

"Pray excuse us," she added in a milder tone. "I do not feel well enough to talk any more."

"I beg a thousand pardons!" cried Wayne. "I will call a carriage at once and take you home."

"Please, please do not," pleaded the voice which had become agitated again. "Miss Mowry and I will get along very nicely."

"I'm quite able to take care of her without help," spoke up the elderly woman sharply, flashing upon both of us, but I imagined more particularly upon me, a glance of withering contempt. I think a profound fear of Miss Mowry was born in me at that moment.

"Please don't think I do not appreciate your kindness," added Miss Bueford; "but I am sure that all I need is quiet."

Our presence was so obviously unwelcome to her, that it would have been little short of a crime to have remained longer. Wayne, plainly very much discomfited, bade the two women good afternoon

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and hurried me, stunned and uncertain of my own emotions, away.

"Your confounded fancies have led me into making a fool of myself!" he muttered, disgustedly. "That girl has so much pride, and is so easily offended, that I am really afraid of her. Strange, too."

He went on in moody silence for a few minutes.

All at once both of us experienced a new emotion, very different, undoubtedly, but in each case strong. It was occasioned by the sight of a rather flashily dressed young man, with a pale, dissipated face, a cane, an eye-glass, and a tall silk hat. This young man manifested so much trepidation when he saw us, that if we had not known him we could hardly have failed to see that he knew us. But I did know him. At first in a blind, unintelligible way, and then like a flash, in a most vivid and distinct way, it came upon me that this young man had made one of the group which I had surprised when I pushed open the door of Sidonie's apartments a month ago. This man had been standing beside the fallen woman, and when J. Tum had placed the table-cover over her, I remembered to have seen him stoop and hastily draw smooth a corner which had doubled under, that it might more effectually serve the purpose of concealing from me the face upon the floor. Perhaps it was the association this man suggested, that became the father of one of those sudden intuitive ideas to which women more than men are liable. I found myself endeavoring to establish a connection between that

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prostrate figure on the floor of Sidonie's sitting-room and Miss Bueford. If it had indeed been she, and I had chanced to see her face in the first moments of my entrance, might not this be a solution of my strange impression that her face was familiar to me? To be sure I could not recollect that I had seen her face, but my mind had been so dull at the time, and my remembrance of the scene was still so imperfect and indistinct, that a lack of certainty on my part was hardly conclusive. The dissipated young man, who at first seemed inclined to run away, concluded to increase his pace, and hurried by us with a brief nod to my friend.

"Wayne," I exclaimed, "who is that man?"

"If I should judge by appearances," Wayne returned, with a tinge of something very like jealousy, "I should say he was the guardian angel of Amy Bueford. But that's so out of keeping with his record, confound him! Poor fellow, I can't blame him, I suppose."

I thought from my friend's tone that this must be almost a matter of regret with him.

"*You* ought to know who he is," Wayne went on, after a pause. "I don't know that you ever did know it, but I do know that everybody else did. He was hopelessly in love with Sidonie before you met her, and he may be still, for all I know. You see, old fellow, this Amy Bueford is a sort of protégé of mine. I have done a little something for her in a quiet way, but it will always destroy the pure and unalloyed satisfaction, that I might otherwise take in

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this fact, to remember that it was through Fred Mulcher that I came to help her. He discovered her, found out how she was persecuted, and told me the facts. He called on me one night at my rooms, and he wanted to pledge me to secrecy, too, that's the odd part of it. It almost seemed as if it was the only good deed of his life and he was ashamed of it. He told me that this young woman was in trouble, out of money, almost suffering for food, and that this infernal old rascal Tum had, under the pretext of furnishing her with work, been trying to get her into his power." I interrupted him with irritation:

"Why is it that you never told me this? I would have had Sidonie send him out of the house."

"Naturally, but you must promise not to do so by reason of any statement which I make to you. This is in the profoundest confidence between us two. I gave Mulcher my word that I would make no trouble; that's the long and short of it. And besides, you can't blame Tum; it's his nature! Well, I investigated the matter, I became interested, and I have helped her, of course without her knowledge. It's a curious case. This Miss Bueford is a refined, intelligent, highly educated young lady. I find her in the humblest kind of lodgings, with her rent in arrears, apparently without a friend in the world except this Miss Mowry, an uneducated, sharp-spoken but kind-hearted old maid, who apparently makes up in the intensity of her devotion for her solitary position as an intimate acquaintance. If she knows anything about Amy Bueford, she keeps it well to

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herself. I have tried to pump her in vain. I must say I have exhausted the fertility of my resources to satisfactorily account for this girl's forsaken condition. Why, she is barely twenty; she is a most beautiful and charming little woman; she has been reared in luxury; and, in spite of it all, here she is doing copying which I manage to get for her — unknown to her, you understand, you can't patronize her — at a few miserable dollars per week. I'm sorry to reflect upon the integrity or humanity of my own sex, but there's a man at the bottom of this, somewhere, and a damned bad one."

I listened to my friend with breathless interest. I do not remember anything that ever interested me more than this simple story.

"Wayne," I said, "show me where she lives."

"With the greatest pleasure," he returned. "I found some cosey little rooms for her in Brooklyn. Some evening I will take you there to call."

"I will not wait till then," I said. "I want to know now."

"But we can't get in! They are not there!"

"I do not care to get in. Only show me the outside."

Wayne stopped short in his walk, looked at me apprehensively, remonstrated, sighed, and ended by yielding to my whim.

It was a tall brick building which looked like what it was, a genteel lodging-house, with nothing to distinguish it from the thousands of genteel lodging-houses all about it; but it at once became in-

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vested with an atmosphere of wonderful individuality and fascination. I made him point out the windows of her rooms. They were in the third story.

I do not attempt to analyze my feelings. I am sure I did not know then what new power had entered into my life. I only knew that a feeling, half sad, half tender, and later on a most intense excitement, that betrayed itself in rapid pulsation and feverish respiration as if I had found myself on the verge of some great discovery, seemed to increase within me as the hours passed. I could not remain in the house; in the early evening I stole forth, without a word of explanation to Wayne, and bent my steps to the ferry. The moon was rising. It was a clear night in October. The lights sparkled everywhere, — in the heavens, in the myriad windows, in the streets, in the water; bells rang musically; gay floating palaces went by me; happy people jostled me, — to have lived so long and never to have discovered what an Aladdin's palace this world was, it was wonderful!

How easily I picked that tall brick house out from its neighbors! I saw the light shining in the window in the third story. I walked up and down, looking at it.

O divine mystery! O strange elation! O wondrous dream that comes to all of us! — it was mine too. I cannot think of it now without a foolish tear.

I have often wondered since if I was not a little mad in those days. After a while I crossed the street, ascended the steps, and rang the bell. A

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woman answered the summons. My wildly beating heart was chilled at her appearance. It seemed impossible that any face but the face in my soul should open that door. I stood looking at her in dumb bewilderment.

"What do you want?" she sharply asked.

"I—I do not know."

She shut the door in my face. But I had only uttered the truth. I did not know.

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CHAPTER II.

WE MEET AGAIN.

THE next day I reminded Wayne of his promise. That evening we went to Brooklyn to call on Miss Bueford. On the way Wayne said to me:

"It seems to me that you somewhat overrate the intimacy that exists between this lady and myself; but you must understand I am to her simply one of her employers. I give her copying to do. I bought a barrel of old documents from a ragman, and she's copied about half of them. Sometimes I take them myself, sometimes I send them by some one else; for I tell you if she once suspects, it's all up with us."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that this girl is too proud to accept charity in any form. If she thought this money which she so richly earns came out of my pocket, she'd go back to the old starvation business so quick it would make my head swim. I have to look out for that, and I am very cautious; so don't you drop a hint that will lead her to suspect that I am not of the legal profession."

"The legal profession?"

"Certainly. How else could I bring her all these documents? I wonder she never remarked the ex-

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ceedingly varied nature of the collection. Hang it! I made it varied on purpose. It must be terrible to write away at the same old grind day after day, especially for one who isn't used to it. So I throw in a little bit of verse once in a while, or a page or two of good prose. I suppose she thinks it's something I'm going to read in court. I don't know, I'm sure, what funny little ideas dance through her inexperienced head when she thinks of me. I wish I did." Wayne sighed.

"My dear fellow," I cried, in sudden recognition of a fact which I had known for many years, "you have a great, big heart!"

"Don't mention it," said Wayne. "To condemn or praise a man for what he is, is equally unphilosophical. And besides, let me give you a gentle hint. Did you ever notice how readily charity comes from a male hand to a young and beautiful sufferer? If it was not I who had helped Amy Bueford, it would have been some one else. Add forty years to her age, and try us over again if you want to blush for us."

The door of Miss Bueford's rooms was opened to us by Miss Mowry. I could see that the elderly woman was very greatly disturbed by our coming; and I fancied that there was more anger than anything else in the look which she cast at me over my friend's shoulder. Nevertheless she asked us to step in. It was a bright little room: not luxurious, but very warm and homelike; and it seemed to me to be pervaded by the fine, ineffable perfume, that appeals

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only to the higher senses, of a sweet personality. But there was nobody present except Miss Mowry. On a little table in the corner, writing materials carelessly laid down seemed to indicate a hasty departure. I could easily believe that our entrance had been preceded by the flight of Miss Bueford.

"Sit down, Mr. Wayne. Let me take your hat," said Miss Mowry.

The courtesy was extended wholly to my friend. After the glance she had bestowed upon me in the hall, she refrained from noticing me.

"I will tell Miss Bueford you've come," she said, and went into another room. I remained standing, awkwardly holding my hat, till Wayne induced me to be seated. We waited a very long time. Then the door which Miss Mowry had closed after her was opened, and I saw the woman, the subtle essence of whose being had haunted me for many consecutive hours. She was very pale, cold, self-contained. I had but imperfectly seen her upon the bridge, and behind the veil. Now there were only a few feet between us. I was breathing the very air that she breathed, looking unchecked into her eyes. I felt for the moment faint and helpless, like one who has drunk too deeply of a rich perfume. She gave Mr. Wayne her hand; she bowed to me distantly. Of course we had both risen when she entered; she did not ask us to resume our seats.

In a few well-chosen words, uttered in a low, tremulous voice that had such a world of pathos in it to my ear that I could hardly restrain my tears when

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I heard it, she told my friend that she had finished the work he had given her to do, and gave him a little packet, and took from him another in return.

Wayne stammered and blushed like a youth, and said he hoped she had not been obliged to hurry too much to complete the last lot, and that she might take her own time with the next.

She thanked him prettily and shyly; but there was constraint and iciness under every word she said, every motion that she made. When the business had been finished, there was a very awkward pause. Miss Mowry stood in the corner, looking daggers at me. Miss Bueford remained in the middle of the room. Her glance fell; a bright spot glowed in either cheek; her breathing was noticeably rapid; she seemed feverish, and she appeared to be suffering. Oh, there was such an ocean of pity for her in my heart! but I could not have uttered one syllable of it without weeping.

"Both myself and my friend have felt exceedingly anxious to know whether you had recovered from your indisposition of yesterday," said Wayne. "We also desired to apologize for forcing ourselves upon you at such a moment."

"I am very sorry," returned Miss Bueford. "I am very sure it is I who should apologize. But I felt — very —" She stopped helplessly, stammered, made an unavailing effort to control herself, and then suddenly turned and fled. Miss Mowry went after her instantly and closed the door. I thought I heard the sound of sobbing above the incessant monotone of

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the elderly woman's voice. Wayne and I looked at each other in mute distress.

Presently Miss Mowry came back. As before, she addressed herself exclusively to my friend. She spoke in a sharp, business-like tone:

"Miss Bueford sends word that she is ill, and that you will have to excuse her."

"Ill!" echoed Wayne. "What can I do? Tell me! Does she need the doctor? I am entirely at her service."

"She needs nothing half so much as quiet and freedom from intrusion of strangers," returned Miss Mowry, in a tone of deep conviction. "I don't mean *you*."

I trembled. There was no doubt that I stood in much awe of Mowry. Wayne stared at me helplessly.

"Then — then — there is nothing that I can do?" he faltered.

"Not the first thing in the world, other than leave her quiet."

This was positive. There was no appeal. Wayne awkwardly withdrew. As a matter of course, I followed him.

I thought Miss Mowry slammed the door after us with unnecessary force.

"This is very extraordinary," said Wayne, as we went down the stairs. "I am terribly afraid there is something very serious the matter with my little protégé. And I never saw the old one act so queerly. She seemed to bristle all over when we

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went in. I must get Mowry alone and have a talk with her."

I scarcely heard what he was saying. There was no longer any doubt in my heart about the motive that actuated me. I was literally madly in love. When I came to realize it, I came also to take precautions to prevent other people from discovering it. I made it the one great entrancing secret of my life. Hitherto Wayne had been my confidant in everything. On this matter my lips were sealed. It was the instinct of the miser who conceals the possession of his greatest treasures beneath a ragged coat. Every hour I saw the whole force of my new passion in a clearer light. Under its inspiration it was no longer a matter of indifference whether or no I should take the good doctor's advice and "start in new." It was an imperative necessity for me to do so. Life began to have a meaning. The old despondent cynical feeling suddenly gave place to grand hope, wide enough to fill the whole breadth of my being. I pictured to myself the possibility of a real, deep, and lasting happiness. I saw an incentive where before there had been only a questioning doubt. I really wished, in the enthusiasm of my new emotions, that I had been poor, that I could see life a battle before me, so that I might go on and fight my way up and make a home for her and for me. It seemed to me that existence then would have a novelty, an interest, and a meaning which I had hitherto sadly failed to find in it.

Every day, every evening, I went to the street

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of genteel lodging-houses to walk up and down before the door, to watch the light in the window in the third story, to picture to myself the scene in the interior, transformed and sanctified by that gentle presence, to wait for her appearance in the street. On several occasions she came out while I was there, and I followed her at a distance, buttoning my coat up about my face, and pulling my hat well over my eyes. At such times she was always accompanied by Miss Mowry. She went sometimes to a stationer's, but more often for a simple walk. There was a little park a few streets away; and by or through this little patch of autumnal nature, full of the rustle of fallen leaves and the breath of the threatening winter, she generally went or came.

I never dared to approach her or to make my presence known. I longed to see some danger threaten her which might give me an opportunity to do so without apparent intrusion. It did not come.

During one of these walks I encountered Mr. Fred Mulcher. He did not recognize me. I felt a glow of fiery and jealous indignation when I recollected what Wayne had said to me about him. That this man, whose garments were infected with the breath of riot and indulgence, should stand in any possible light as a protector of a lady like Amy Bueford seemed an unpardonable offence. It was the more unbearable because it seemed as if he must have been actuated by a spirit of entire dis-

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interestedness. This made the second time that I had met him in the neighborhood of Miss Bueford. Was he hovering around her as I was? After all, how was I any better than he, or what constituted me a fitter protector of such an inestimably purer being than either of us? But such a reflection did not prevent me from hating him, and thinking of him always with a bitter suspicion.

Alas! this was not all that troubled me. The secret which Sidonie had whispered in my ear, when I lay sick in the chamber under her care, had from that moment made me fearful and uneasy. In the first intoxication of my new madness, I had forgotten it. Now it was coming back to me again, wearing a threatening and portentous mien. Sidonie had been nothing to me since my awakening, She never could be aught to me again, but I felt her as a millstone around my neck. She had woven those soft insinuating arms about me, and they made a chain far heavier than iron.

One day when I was in my room at Wayne's apartment, I heard my friend answer a summons at the door. When I casually questioned him about it, he made evasive answers.

"I would advise you," he said, "to let this matter rest."

But I did not. I persisted. I found that J. Tum had come from Sidonie with a note for me, and then I got from Wayne that this was only one of several which had been brought. My friend had quietly put them aside, believing, he said, that I had better not

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see them for a while. I was somewhat angry at the insinuation that I was unable to manage my own affairs. I demanded the letter. Wayne shrugged his shoulders and gave it to me. It read:

Mon cher Ansel, — I am in great distress about you, that you do not answer anything to my appeal. Will you not see my physician right away? That which I have told you is so serious to me, I cannot rest and sleep for trembling. *Est-ce que vous avez oublié*

SIDONIE?

If I had been strong, self-reliant, manly, I could have faced this unwelcome question of duty, now at this time as well as at another. I was neither strong nor self-reliant; like a coward, I put the matter behind me; I said to myself, I will wait.

If this course was cowardly, it was none the less very human. I saw precious possibilities of life, of happiness, opening before me. In spite of every obstacle, I determined to pursue that vision to the end, till I had proved it to be a reality or an illusion.

My resolution was simply this: Amy first; I will think about Sidonie afterwards.

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CHAPTER III.

A COINCIDENCE.

NOTWITHSTANDING this resolution, I nerved myself for the ordeal of an immediate interview with Sidonie. When no other avenue of information seemed open to me, I turned to this incomprehensible French girl for a last effort to unravel the mystery of the curious impression of familiarity that Amy Bueford, from the first, had made upon me. Two hours after Wayne had yielded to my importunities to explain the summons at the door of his suite, I was letting myself with my latch-key into the house where Sidonie still lived.

It was the same richly carpeted hall, with the small bronze statue in the corner, the pictures on the wall, and the stairs before me leading up, which had produced in me such an overwhelming sense of previous association when I had dragged myself into the midst of it, after my rash flight from Bromberg almost two months ago; and there was something left even now of that strange feeling. My clearer understanding or my greater self-consciousness analyzed that feeling more accurately. It was not alone a sense of familiarity, but a sense of a dread and

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an oppression that made the air seem too heavy to breathe.

I went up the stairs that I had once found so difficult to climb, and came to the door which, on that memorable occasion, I had seen ajar. It was closely shut now. I heard the sound of a man's voice within and a woman's laugh, — a peculiar laugh resembling no other I ever heard. Like everything else about Sidonie, it bore the impress of her odd individuality.

If I had waited a few moments outside the door, I might undoubtedly have overheard something that would have interested me, for the voices were carelessly loud; but I felt ashamed to stoop to such a meanness. I knocked at once. The voices ceased. After a brief delay, the door was opened by J. Tum. He exhibited a great deal of trepidation when he saw me, and stepped back several paces with strange alacrity, quite as if he had suspected me of a design to assault him. He stood then by the little table in the centre of the room, making one of a startled group of three. Sidonie and Mr. Fred Mulcher were the other two. For the moment, all three stared at me silently. As I stood on the threshold, it almost seemed that time had taken a sudden leap backwards, and that I, breathless and fainting from my recent exertion and excitement, had just come upon the strange scene in the midst of which was the motionless woman on the floor. Nothing was wanting but that prostrate figure to make the illusion complete.

Sidonie was the first to recover her composure,

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It was astonishment that had enchained her; it was joy that set her free. She sprang to meet me with a glad cry, threw both arms around my neck, exclaiming: "Ansel! *mon* Ansel! He have come back! He have come back!" Rather ungraciously, I released myself.

"I did not come here for this. This is trifling, childish," I said peevishly.

"Ah, so?" she returned, her expression undergoing a quick transformation. She stood a little way off, looking at me darkly. "You think it childish that I am glad to see you, eh? Ver well, ver well, monsieur." I did not remember to have heard her call me monsieur before.

Mr. Mulcher remained in the background, uneasily holding his hat in one hand, and with the other using his dainty cane to switch the table-cover in a manner that was meant to convey his supreme indifference of my presence, but which did not in the least disguise his extreme nervousness.

The strange-looking, little old man, with the white hair and bright eyes, appeared to be somewhat disturbed by the turn affairs had taken. I caught a glimpse of him, though he was beyond the direct range of my vision, endeavoring to attract Sidonie's attention, and making signs to her in his mysterious alphabet. Whether it was through any interference of his, I could not of course determine; but the erratic French girl all at once assumed another countenance. She became penitent and sympathetic.

"You are not feeling splendid, and you come to

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see me; and I have rush at you, and put you out of shape. I ought to think of that all, when I know you are yet sick. Come, let us sit down, us two, and chat."

She drew me into the corner by the window. It was her especial corner, where she was accustomed to curl herself up on a billowy divan of blue plush, and luxuriate in contemporary French authors, and where I remembered to have seen her on several occasions literally buried in literature. The books were here now, knee-deep almost, and lying about in distracting disorder.

I sat down beside a little table that supported a reading-lamp, and she sank upon the divan before me. Her perfect fingers interlocked behind her head, and her rare blue eyes looked at me reproachfully. It was a matter of not a little wonder to myself that I could look upon this dangerously fascinating creature with so much indifference and distrust.

"I guess you'll have to excuse *me*," Mr. Mulcher remarked a little stiffly, looking at his watch. "I've got an appointment at three."

Sidonie did not even look at him.

"*Au revoir*," she said, carelessly.

Mr. Mulcher and J. Tum went out together. We were alone. Sidonie gave me a curious glance.

"Ansel, you was not jealous of that one, a little bit?"

I answered her curtly:

"You are absurd! There is no possibility of any jealousy between us,"

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"Ah, is there not?" she said with an injured pout. "You are speaking not for me, I think. You have forgot some things, but you cannot have forgot that oath we have take?"

"What oath?" I questioned, starting.

"*Fidélité eternelle! Toujours!* We were not allowed to marry, you and I; but we could swear that, and so we did, did we not? As to me, I have keep that oath. Will you doubt it?"

"Sidonie," I replied, with a momentary sting of conscience, "I have never questioned your devotion and your love. I only wish, for my own sake, that I could feel as manly about my own position as I am sure you may feel blameless in your own heart for yours. Some time— But I must not talk about this now. I have something very serious to ask of you."

"I would rather talk about thees, Ansel," she said softly. "Do you got my letters?"

"Yes."

"And you have not forgot me? My physician, you will see him——"

"Don't!" I interrupted, impatiently. "I say I will not talk of this now. Please oblige me. I did not come here for this."

She arose to a sitting posture in an instant.

"If you are cross like that—ver well, I read."

She took up a book, opened it in the middle, threw herself suddenly upon the divan, adjusted her head upon a cushion, and lay with her back toward me, apparently intently engaged in her volume.

I went on as if nothing had happened;

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"And now, having told you what I did *not* come for, I will venture to state what I did come for."

I paused. Sidonie turned over a leaf.

"I came for the purpose of demanding an explanation. I have never asked you about that scene that I surprised in this room when I broke in here at the time of my sickness. I thought perhaps you would tell me of your own free will. Since you did not, I have decided to request you to do so."

I saw that the book received a shock imparted to it by the hand that held it. The hand soon steadied itself, however, and she spoke:

"Why have you not ask that Mulcher boy about it? He was here."

"I know; but I ask you now."

"Well, what then ees it?"

"I want to know who that woman was I saw upon the floor, and how she came there."

Sidonie's tone was a triumph of assumed indifference.

"Ees *thees* all?"

"That is all."

"Ver well, I will tell you when I have think. It is such a ver long time ago, monsieur, that I have quite almost forgot all about it."

"Take your own time," said I.

She did take her own time. After several minutes I saw that she was turning over another leaf, and was apparently reading intently.

"Why do you trifle about this matter?" I asked sternly. "If it is a secret, say so; and I will go away."

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"*Pardonnez-moi!*" exclaimed Sidonie; "I had really forget; the book ees so intent! *Eh, bien* — to return to thees woman on the floor in my room. How ees it that she gets there? It ees because she have fainted. *Ma foi!* it is all silly; but I will tell. This woman is name Sarah Brandon. Long time ago she have live with this Mulcher boy, and he have desert her. She comes here, that one, because she with me have once paint the designs on porcelain, and we have been good friends. While she have been here, the boy comes. You must know why all about that too. He have bought *petites* shares of stocks for me down town with which I have sometimes make good thing. He comes then just to tell me that Saint Jo. have fell; and when Sarah Brandon have seen him, she bounce on the floor. Ask Mulcher."

Sidonie apparently had not discontinued her reading in order to say this. After she had finished, she turned over another leaf.

"Are you sure you have told me the woman's name?"

"Sure!" said Sidonie, positively, giving her piquant little accent to the monosyllable.

"Then why, in the name of reason, did Tum try to conceal her with the table-cover when I came in?"

Sidonie sat up suddenly, faced me, and threw down her book.

"You make me crazy about that woman!" she cried indignantly. "J. Tum! why do he do anything? No one knows."

"Is that all you have to say about it?"

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"*Oui, monsieur; c'est tout.*"

I don't know why I did it. I stooped and picked up the book which she had been pretending to read. I opened it at random. I was not really looking at the printed page; but I became aware, all at once, of one fact, — the name Sarah Brandon was repeated at frequent intervals.

"It is rather strange," I remarked, "that Sarah Brandon appears to be the principal character in this book you were looking at when you told me this story."

Sidonie opened her blue eyes very widely. She came and looked over my shoulder, and bent close down till her warm breath fanned my cheek.

"Ees it not all ver queer," she murmured in a tone of wonder, "how thees happen like that? What *drôles* coincidences are sometimes making themselves once in a time!"

Nor were my sharpest inquiries ever able to draw from her a more satisfactory explanation. You may take it as an evidence of my own credulity or of Sidonie's wondrous powers of fascination; I tell the simple truth when I say that it was almost impossible for me to stand before her and meet her steady gaze and doubt her honesty or her innocence. I went away from the house uncertain, confused. I thoroughly wished I had not been foolish enough to see her.

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CHAPTER IV.

WE PART.

MINE was not a nature that could long content itself with sighs and glances from a distance. The nightly wanderings about the house in Brooklyn came one evening to an abrupt termination — one star-crowned, frosty evening in October, when I met Miss Bueford in the little park, face to face. It was no accident. It could not by any possibility have been. I had followed her since she left the house. Long-meditated but desperate resolution had nerved me to throw myself in her way. I saw her coming before she saw me, walking beside Miss Mowry in the midst of the stream of people who were passing along at the right of the wide gravelled path. I stood a little aside from the throng, and when she came opposite me, I summoned all my courage and raised my hat. The lights were behind me. She had not seen me till that moment.

Miss Mowry uttered an exclamation of alarm. The younger woman stopped as suddenly as if she had seen a precipice before her. She did not return my bow, and her great brown eyes dilated as they looked at me. Instinctively, as if for protection, she reached out and took hold of her companion's

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shawl. Despite the semi-obscurity, I could see that she was very deeply agitated.

This episode was brief. Miss Bueford recovered herself; her face assumed an heroic expression; without even a pretence of formal recognition, she was about to pass on. I felt that my knees trembled, but nevertheless, I would not retreat. I stepped fairly into her path. She became still and cold.

"Miss Bueford," I said, and there was a choking in my throat, "I would like to speak to you alone for a single instant."

Something very like a shiver passed through her, but she did not remove the steady gaze of the great brown eyes from my face. It seemed like a look of contempt. I was almost afraid of her. I thought then that my petition would be denied. I could hardly credit my senses, or conceal my tumultuous joy, when she waved Miss Mowry to a seat a little way off, saying to her a few words in an undertone. After bestowing upon me a most savage scowl, Miss Mowry went very reluctantly. The settee was but a few feet away, but she took care to sit down as near as possible to us on the very end, and watched us with catlike narrowness throughout the scene that ensued. There was another seat just back of where we stood; because of the chilliness of the evening, nobody was occupying it. I pointed to it. Miss Bueford immediately seated herself at my side.

I felt the intoxication of a profound emotion. My heart beat so violently that I seemed to hear it. My cheeks and my temples burned. I was so near to

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her that the delicate perfume of her delicious presence found its way to my brain. A feverish, almost irresistible desire, quite in keeping with my madness, to take her in my arms, in spite of everything, made me almost recoil from myself in terror. My spirit seemed suddenly to divide itself into two. One yielded itself blindly to the wild delirious impulses of the moment; the other, in the better realization of consequence, endeavored to restrain it. In the midst of the struggle, an icy sentence called me to myself. I had been sitting like an idiot staring into her face. Her patience had exhausted itself.

"Well," she said, "you are alone with me. What do you wish?"

She had manifestly attempted to make her tone one of cold civility; if there had not been perceptible in it just the slightest tremble in the world, which, in spite of her, insisted on betraying itself, I hardly think I should have had the courage to proceed.

"Miss Bueford," I said, "I cannot help believing that I have met you some time in my past life. I have no memory of much that has transpired in that time. I beg of you to tell me if I am in error."

A spasm of intense pain came into her face; the sad, brown eyes closed for an instant. She seemed to be fighting an inward battle, — a battle between a natural weakness and an unnatural resolution. The resolution triumphed. The eyes opened slowly and looked fearlessly into mine; every line of expression in her beautiful face hardened itself; her tone was formal, heartless.

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"You and I are strangers. This is the first time God has permitted us to meet. We must make it the last."

I did not understand then the effort it cost her to say these words. Much that I have written and shall write about this strange interview is only possible in the light of my clearer intellect and clearer understanding. If ever a man was insane in his passion, I was. My thoughts were feverish and quick. I had no time for analysis. I saw at this moment only an adorable girl who was a stranger to me. I could not doubt the truth of one word that she uttered. It would have been as unnatural as for the fanatical seer of visions to doubt the integrity of a heavenly visitant, or for the idol-worshipper to suspect his god of duplicity.

I had a momentary thought to ask her if it had been she whom I had seen on the floor at Sidonie's; but I found it impossible to speak of that woman in this presence. I answered her humbly:

"Not as strangers, Miss Bueford; even if we have never met before, not as strangers. Since I saw you that Sunday on the bridge, I have been living on the memory of your face; I have been always near you, sometimes only in dreams, often in reality, standing on the street looking up to the light in your little chamber when you were not thinking of me."

She drew away from me, the better to look full into my face, wondering, incredulous, trembling. She did not speak; she whispered:

"You have done all this? why?"

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Then I pronounced her Christian name aloud for the first time, in saying that little sentence that is so trite that it makes us smile; so wonderful that the wisest philosopher cannot wholly solve its mystic meaning; so interwoven with the destinies of men and women in all ages that it overaws us when we reflect:

"Amy, I love you."

Her wonder, her incredulity, her trembling increased. The violent struggle of antagonistic sentiments was renewed within her. It was the same triumph of resolution over weakness; the same tone, formal and heartless, as before:

"Is that *all* you have to say to me?"

Was it all! I had summed up in four words the possibilities of my whole future, and she asked me if it was all! I could not speak. There was a very long silence. She seemed waiting for a reply. She spoke at last, and her voice was harder than ever:

"Well, what do you wish me to do?"

I looked at her helplessly.

"To become my wife," I faltered.

"I do not understand you."

As for me, I understood one thing only: there was no encouragement, no hope in that fixed expression, in that bitter tone. I cried out wildly, my words escaping me in a half-frenzied, piteous wail:

"Oh! you will not refuse it? It means life, ambition, hope, everything to me! I love you! Do not tell me you despise me!"

For the first time there was a tremor of sympathy,

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a momentary evidence of relenting in her face. I fancied she answered so quickly because she wished to conceal her emotions.

"Oh, it is not a question of *me* at all," she hastened to say. "It is a question of *you*. We will leave my feelings entirely out of sight. Let us understand each other and bring this meeting to an end; it is very painful to me; it is evidently painful to you. Your uncle is dead; you are a rich man; you are no longer accountable to anybody for what you do; you want a wife whom you can introduce to your friends." She seemed momentarily unable to continue.

"You know of my uncle!" I exclaimed, "and of his death?"

"Forgive me," she said quickly, with renewed resolution. "I forgot what entire strangers we are. Mr. Wayne told me about it. You have interrupted me. You remember what I was saying. I have not misunderstood you?"

Cold with foreboding and despair, I answered her, that she had not.

"Then I must be firm and plain with you. What you ask is impossible. I will never consent to be that woman."

"You refuse me!" my trembling lips faltered. "Will you not say why?"

She answered me without passion, without unnecessary vehemence:

"I will say why. It is because I cannot forget. You say you have forgotten much. I have prayed for such a refuge from myself many times, but it has

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been denied me. I cannot forget the bitterness and the woe of my life. A few months ago, I was an innocent, unsuspecting girl; the world was hard, but it was bright. A man came to me, as you come to me now, and said that he loved me; offered to become my protector. Since then I have suffered; I have known starvation and insult. I am not reproaching anybody; this path was of my own choosing. I made him a promise that I would not betray him. Ansel, I have kept my promise. I shall always keep it. Not even the torture of a living death could wring it from me. You may judge from that whether I loved this man or not; whether I love him still. But why should we prolong this agony? There is an impassable barrier between us. I have allowed you to speak to me, that there might be no possibility of a misunderstanding. I am sorry for you if you suffer. I have suffered also. You must be brave as well as I. I shall rely on your honor, on your manhood, never to see me again. Let us say good by now, — and part."

Every trace of emotion had vanished from her face; the battle in her heart was over. She sat there statue-like, and still with her fair, white face, so young, so courageous, turned earnestly to mine. The great brown eyes looked at me with an intensity that made them seem almost black. Her countenance was exalted, sublime as might have been that of a martyr who saw the stake before him. I felt her little hand seeking my own. I took it. It was very cold.

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"Forever!" she whispered. "It is a terrible, terrible, long word, but we two must say it."

In the solemnity of that moment, I was conscious of everything that went on about me. I saw the people going and coming, looking at us curiously. I knew that the thousand lights of the great city twinkled all about us; that the eternal stars shone on over our heads. My heart was chilled, my whole being benumbed. I hardly realized the full meaning of what I had lost. I felt that she pitied me, no more, but that encouraged me to speak the thought that was in my heart, and I did speak it with the simplicity of a child.

"I would like to kiss you, Amy. The people will see us. Do you care?"

"I do not care," she answered in a voice of utter desolation. "You may kiss me, if you like."

She approached her white forehead to my lips. Perhaps I was mad; perhaps I did not know the respect due to women; perhaps I was selfish. It was not the kiss of respect that was offered me that I took. Mine was the kiss of love. I put my arm about her with sudden strength, and our lips met.

She uttered a startled cry and rose up. For an instant she stood looking into my face with an affrighted mien, and then she fled. I heard the suppressed laughter of the crowd. I did not heed it. I did not follow her. I stood a little while dazed, dreaming. Then I went on, slowly and toilsomely; back to Wayne, back to Sidonie and the old life.

I was a fool, you say. Rather say I was a mad-

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man. Even if I had been possessed of what the doctors would have agreed to call a mind free from hallucinations, I was very far from enjoying the clear, keen perception of those who follow me through these dim chambers of my past. To me, Miss Bueford was an angel far above me, who had dropped for me a tear of purest pity, because she saw me suffering a hopeless grief. I had followed my vision to the end; I had seen it vanish; there was no longer anything in the way of all that Sidonie desired.

That night I said to my friend: "I am prepared, Wayne, to hear you call me a fool, but I have made up my mind; I shall marry within a week."

He bounded from his chair.

"Marry! In the name of God, whom?"

"Sidonie."

He was utterly overwhelmed.

"Ansel, have you lost your reason?"

I turned upon him in all the earnestness of my nature, and took him by the shoulders and made him look into my face.

"I have lived the life of a coward, — a good-for-nothing," I said, "but I have not lost every spark of manhood yet. It is not for her sake, so much; it is certainly not for the sake of a vagabond like myself. It is for the sake of the child whom she will bring into the world. Come, come, my friend, God — perhaps I should say my own folly — has decreed that I cannot be happy. Is there any reason why I should not at least be *just?*"

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Wayne could scarcely speak.

"But you are sacrificing yourself!" he faltered.

"You don't know," I answered. "I have nothing left to sacrifice; I do not care what becomes of me. Sidonie loves me; this will make her happy; it will prevent a future wrong greater than either of us can see."

"But you will wait!" he cried.

"No!" said I. "At once; it is imperative!"

I had made up my mind, and nothing could shake my resolution. Against all the protestations of my friend, I held to my purpose with an unwavering determination that had its roots deep down in despair. I was my own master; I did as I willed. I married Sidonie, in a private wedding, before the month was out. I have very little memory of the ceremony. A vision of that fascinating face, pale with excitement, whispering fond French phrases in my ear; of Wayne, serious and resigned; of a brief, cold, formal service, — is all that remains to me.

Before night Wayne and I were whirling away by rail to California. Curious honeymoon! I left my new wife at home and went away with a friend for an absence of two months. But I had only taken the advice of my physicians. It was not that I cared to prolong my life; I would have accepted any excuse which would have carried me away from Sidonie at that time. I could not say that my aversion for her had increased; but my soul was so full of the precious, melancholy thoughts of a far dearer presence, that there was no room for another face.

Would there ever be?

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PART III.—THE BELL STRIKES.

CHAPTER I.

THE AFTERNOON.

TWO months later I was sitting at the table in the rear room of the pretty suite on the third floor of the apartment house wherein I had had so strange an experience soon after my removal from Sidonie's, — the room whose windows looked out upon the rear wall of the church with the heavy bell. My friend Wayne had just come in and laid a great bundle of documents upon a corner of the table.

"There are the papers found in your uncle's writing-desk," he said. "You ought to have had them a long time ago, I suppose. They have been lying tied up like this in the lawyer's office, till they have got covered with dust. There may be something among them that will interest you. Well, have you got moved in? And how do you like it?"

"Inasmuch as my moving in consisted of my walking up and taking possession when I found that the apartment was open to me, I should say I had done so. As to how I like it, you will judge of

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that when I tell you that I have engaged it for six months."

Wayne gave me a distressed and pitying look, and walked to the window that opened out upon the blank wall of the church. A fine snow was falling, and there was a gray reflection everywhere that did not tend to enhance the prospect.

"It is no use for me to suggest that your fancy for this place is a little morbid, I suppose," he said.

"Very likely you are right," I answered him. "I have never tried to analyze my feelings. The place has a strange fascination for me, that is all I know. Ever since you and I came here on the occasion when you tell me I acted so queerly, it has been in my mind, more or less. When I wanted a place to live, I came here at once, hardly daring to hope I should find it vacant. I did find it vacant; here I am, and here I shall remain."

"In spite of the fact that my house, such as it is, is open to you," Wayne added, reproachfully. "Your situation is bad enough, but you seem obstinately determined to make it worse."

"Impossible!" I cried,—"impossible! What can be worse than the situation of the man who finds himself absolutely without hope, without interest in the future? I have put my faith in an adventuress. I have been duped. I come home to find that the specious plea under which I was induced to marry her was all a pretext, all a lie. Not that that matters much in itself, but it is enough, with the rest, to complete the picture. A man who but half lives,

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anyway; whose memory, as in the last dotage of old age, blurs or leaves him altogether; who finds what little happiness he had deemed possible in this world snatched away from him, — what is the use of your optimism to him?"

"I don't know," returned Wayne, half sympathetic, half thoughtful. "I think, if I were in your place, I should pick out a bright spot somewhere; I know I should not come to a place like this. And, besides, there — there *are* worse situations." He looked at me very significantly and I thought with no little nervousness.

"I don't understand you," I said.

"I am afraid, my dear fellow, this a very poor time to add to your burdens, but I really feel that I should not be justified in keeping from you what I have heard. You won't worry, now?"

"Impossible. There is nothing you can say that can add anything to my general disgust with existence, except ——" My heart almost stopped. Was he about to tell me that Amy Bueford was dead?

"Except what?" Wayne asked with manifest anxiety.

"Nothing. What is it about?"

He came and placed his hand upon my shoulder and said with great earnestness: "You want to bear in mind, Lewis, that I have enough for both of us, and that my place is always open to you ——"

I sprang to my feet.

"The property! The property!" I cried. "It's gone!"

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"Really, if I thought you would have taken it as such good news, I would not have been so cautious about mentioning the matter to you. No, it's not gone; it *may* go."

I sat down again.

"Oh!" I said with a sigh, "is *that* all? I thought it was something serious. How is it going?"

"How is it going? You speak as if it were an auction sale in which you didn't have the slightest interest!"

"Well, do you expect me to feign an interest when I don't feel one?"

Wayne drew a long breath, and for the time apparently abandoned me to my fate.

"To make a long story brief," he said, "they tell me that Mrs. Crooke is not dead; that she has been for a long time living in London; that she has heard of her husband's death; that she is on her way to America."

I could not repress an exclamation of astonishment.

"Do you believe it, Wayne?"

"I do not."

"If it is true, it will not prevent me from making a provisional settlement of my property?"

"In the name of Heaven, what are you thinking about?"

"Answer me."

"Of course not."

"Very well; to-night I shall have my lawyers meet her lawyers here, and I shall divide the estate between Sidonie and myself."

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Wayne almost fell down under the shock my words gave him.

"No, no, Ansel," he urged, "you're joking; surely you're joking. You don't mean to do that?"

"Why not?"

"Why not! It is an unnecessary sacrifice. It is rewarding her for her shameful treachery! It is what she has been scheming and planning for! It is the one thing that she ought not to have! It is idiotic, wicked, monstrous! Her own conduct has let noonday light upon her motives. In all that she has ever done, for you or to you, she has been actuated by a mercenary mainspring; and now you are going to reward her for it!"

"You are mistaken, Wayne; Sidonie loves me."

"You are raving; out of your head!" cried my friend. I answered him with calm sincerity:

"I should not say it if I did not know it."

"Because she has told you so!"

"No, because I *feel* it. You cannot account for her confession of her deception in any other way. She might have trumped up any one of a dozen stories which I would have been forced to believe. She would have said anything sooner than that she had willingly deceived me. Instead of that, she cries out: 'I have lie to you, Ansel; I must throw myself before you for forgiveness. I see you slipping away from me; I could not let you go; I made a wrong. *Je t'aime! je t'aime!*'"

I had unconsciously imitated her words, her very tones. Wayne seemed puzzled, but not convinced.

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"Admit that she does love you, then, is there any more logic in your action?"

"Do not pursue me with your logic!" I exclaimed impatiently. "I do a great many things for which I could not give a reason that would satisfy anybody in the wide world but myself. I cannot live with Sidonie. I never realized that so forcibly as when I felt my heart sink as I crossed her threshold on my return from California. There is some mysterious barrier between us. To-day she begged me for a kiss. It made me cold to feel her lips on mine."

"To-day! You have been there?"

"Yes, for the last time. It was the only courageous act I believe I ever did in my life. I had been thinking over the whole situation. I did not write; I went. I said what I had to say kindly, but firmly. She was hysterical; she even fainted. Nevertheless, I believe that she will come here to-night; I believe that she will agree to what I desire, and throw nothing in the way of a peaceable and quiet separation."

"Did you tell her that you wished to divide your property equally with her?"

"I did not. That is what I propose to offer her, through you. You will bring my lawyers here, I suppose, as a necessary formality."

"How do you know *she* has lawyers?"

"She said so."

"Ah! I thought as much," said Wayne, significantly. "In love, insanely in love! yet she employs lawyers to protect herself against an indulgent hus-

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band! My dear boy, do you wish me to help you to-night?"

"I should hardly feel able to go through the ordeal without you."

"Then you must be guided by me, *somewhat*. Will you place this matter entirely in my hands?"

"To execute my wishes?"

"To this extent — to make the best terms with this woman possible."

"What will satisfy her should satisfy me. But I wish to be generous."

"If *she* is," added Wayne, "I will agree with you. Now, my dear boy, say that you place this matter entirely in my hands."

"Well, if you wish it."

To tell the truth, I was very, very glad of this opportunity to shirk a disagreeable duty. Wayne wrung my hand.

"Very well, then, we will consider it settled," he said. "I shall bring the lawyer here to-night, if you have made such an appointment with her. The matter ought to be done in a lawyer's office; why here?"

I was unable to answer him. I had so decreed it. That was all.

Having settled this question, my friend suddenly broached another topic. He did this in a query which awoke a storm of emotion in me.

"Ansel, do you remember my protégé, Miss Bueford?"

I stammered an affirmative.

"Well, I have got two items of news about her,"

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he went on, without noticing my agitation, "one of which certainly will interest you. I visited her last night for the first time since my return. She took away my breath by showing me several checks for large amounts, which she said she had received by mail anonymously, during our absence. To my astonishment she accused *me* of perpetrating the gift, and the postmarks of the different letters actually seemed to bear her out. They were sent from various Western cities where we stopped, and curiously enough, about the time we were there, too. I was glad to be able to deny the bald-headed charity, because she looked a great deal more hurt than pleased about it. She made me promise to hunt up the offender. She declared she never would use the money, and that it must be returned. I was unable to think of anybody but you, who could have sent it, and it seemed absurd, too, that you should even have remembered her; I have never heard you speak of her."

How little we know of the inner lives of our nearest friends! This man had been with me constantly since I had met my fate, and during all this time there had been scarcely a waking hour in which she whom he thought I had forgotten had been absent from my mind.

I turned my face away from him, lest I should betray myself.

"You are quite right," I managed to say,—"quite right."

Nevertheless, I had sent her the money, and her action seemed plainly to indicate that she suspected it.

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"There is nobody else whom I can think of," my friend continued, "but that Fred Mulcher. There is some mystery about his interest in her which I am going to find out; I'll make it my business to hunt him up at once. But all this doesn't interest you, I suppose. The most extraordinary piece of information is yet to come. You remember that Miss Bueford once denied having known you. I chanced to mention your marriage in her presence just after she had given me this commission, when she uttered a scream and fainted. Now was that a curious coincidence, or a proof that she has told us a pretty falsehood?"

A sudden keen emotion thrilled through and through me. Had I been mistaken? Did she really love me, after all? Somehow I remained master of myself. I still sat with my back to Wayne.

"Is that all?" I questioned, as unconcernedly as it was possible for me to speak.

"No. That is not all. This morning I called to inquire after her, and I learned that she was ill. After her fainting fit she had been hysterical, remained awake all night, and was sometimes out of her head. Mowry was as pale as a ghost. There is something very serious the matter. Now what is it?"

"I do not know," I said. "You are wrong if you think it has any possible connection with me. Miss Bueford and I are utter strangers."

"Then you have forgotten your strange impression when you saw her in Central Park?"

"I have not forgotten it. I have changed my opinion about its origin. By the way, Wayne, I neg-

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lected to say that I have a little business which may occupy me during the first part of the evening. It is imperative. It must be attended to. If I am late to-night, you will understand why, and wait."

With my face still turned from him, I knew that he was staring at me in wonder.

"Business?" he murmured.

"Business," I repeated shortly. "Private business. Something in which you are not at all interested."

Wayne made no further reference to the matter.

But the business to which I had referred was indeed imperative. After what I had heard I could not rest, I could not find a place for any other thought, until I had found out for myself whether the supreme thing was true that my throbbing heart suspected,—that Amy Bueford really loved me.

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CHAPTER II.

THE EVENING.

AS soon as Wayne had left me, I went out. It was already dark; the snow had not ceased to fall; the wind was rising; it was a wild night, — a night in perfect keeping with the turbulent emotions that were raging within me.

Through the fantastic whirl of the hazy lights; through the bustle, the confusion, the uproar of the great city, settling its business for the night, — the carriage which I had taken at the corner tossed me along. I felt the hollow roll of the wheels as we passed out of the ferry-house into the boat, the heavy strokes of the engine as we crossed the water, the bumping of the fenders against the piles at the other side, the rattle of the chains in front of us, and then I felt the tossing and saw the misty lights speed by me again. A dozen times I called out to the driver, asking him if it were not possible to drive faster; a hundred times I was half tempted to get out and run. The monotonous delay was intolerable to me.

When we reached the street of genteel lodging-houses, the clocks were striking seven. I made the driver leave me at the corner; I paid him, and he

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went his way. The snow was already quite deep, and the wind seemed rising still. I struggled on against the icy blast to the door of the house which I knew so well. I rang. A woman answered the summons. I made several indistinct efforts before I could communicate my errand. She looked at me curiously as she said:

"Miss Bueford has gone out. There is nobody in her apartment."

I turned back impatiently into the storm. I crossed the street and looked up at the little window in the third story. There was a dim light there, a faint glow on the curtain, seen indistinctly through the sea of snowflakes. It might have been only the reflection from an open fire. I stepped into a doorway and fixed my eyes upon the spot. No shadows came and went. All was still.

The fine snow drove on, the wind whirled it in drifts all about me; hours passed, and still I stood and watched. I could see little across the street except the lighted windows. Several times the door of the house opposite me opened and shut, but there was no change in the dim light on the curtain.

What could possibly keep her all this time? I was filled with strange doubts and misgivings, alternating with wild hopes and foolish dreams of possible happiness; but my determination never left me. I would wait in that doorway all night, if need be. Once in a while my thoughts would stray away to a far different scene, and I wondered what my wife and Wayne and the lawyers were doing in my absence.

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All at once my pulse redoubled its beating. The light on the curtain had become strong. I hastened through the snow toward the door, but I stopped at the foot of the steps, half afraid, doubting my errand and myself for the first time. I walked up and down before the house in an effort to recover my confidence. When I had somewhat gotten the better of my sudden fit of diffidence, I ascended the steps. I had my hand upon the door when I saw somebody coming out. It was a woman. I stepped aside to permit her to pass. A sharp blast blew directly into her face, blinding her; she did not recognize me, but I knew her, — it was Miss Mowry. She went down the steps and hurried away. I was aware of a sudden elation. It was evident that she had gone out on a brief errand for something she had forgotten. She might return immediately, but in any event it was my golden opportunity. In another minute I had passed the servant in the hall, and was ascending the stairs.

In the corridor on the third floor I hesitated. I carefully shook the snow from my garments. I took off my great-coat, and laid it over my arm. I did a thousand little things which it was not necessary to do. A realization of how the precious moments were slipping away from me drove me on at last. I knocked timidly upon the door.

I heard a gentle rustle within, followed by the sound of a drawing bolt; the door rolled back, and I saw her face, pale when it first appeared, paler still when she recognized me. Her hand forsook the

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handle which it held; she tottered back into the room, uttering my Christian name in a voice of terror: "Ansel!"

It was a circumstance which, even in the midst of the great tumult of my own feelings, I could not help remarking. Hardly knowing what I did, I pushed the rolling door back farther and went in and shut it after me.

It was the same bright, ineffable little room; a reading-light burned upon the table; there was an open fire in the grate. The trembling girl who stood before me was in charming deshabille; she had assumed a dainty blue wrapper; her wealth of golden hair, escaping from its fastenings, showered down about her shoulders like a halo. In spite of her pitiful pallor and the dark semicircles beneath her eyes, she was so beautiful she seemed hardly mortal to me.

When she called out my name, I answered her simply.

"Yes, it is I. I have been walking up and down in the snow waiting for you, hour after hour, and you did not come."

When I made her that answer, she staggered back and sank upon a sofa, where she sat watching my face, as I imagine some helpless, tortured wretch in the olden days might have eyed a pitiless inquisitor. She spoke to me in a whisper:

"How dare you come here? How dare you?"

I echoed her words. "How dare I? Amy, I would not have dared to come after our parting,

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if I did not hope that we had cruelly misunderstood each other."

She seemed to catch at one word with a faint hope.

"Misunderstood?" she faltered. "How?"

"When you told me in the park that you did not love me — I thought — perhaps — that was a mistake, and that you did — love me — after all." My words were separated by long, helpless spaces.

She covered her face with her poor little hands and began to sob.

"Oh, this is cowardly, cowardly!" I heard her murmuring.

I watched her with increasing awe, but none the less with a passion of hopeless longing and admiration. I searched the dainty fingers for a marriage ring. There was none there. My heart beat faster than ever. She went on in a voice broken with sobs.

"Oh, I thought you once the soul of honor and tenderness. How my idol has fallen! I see you now in your true light, a fiend incarnate. It is not that you should marry, — I was nothing to you; I could not complain of that, — but that you should come to me afterwards! Why did you come? Why did you come?"

Beside myself, I cried out: "Only to hear you say that you loved me."

She uttered a low moan.

"It is my fault," she said somberly, — "my fault. I thought I was so strong to do what I had set for myself! I am nothing but a poor, weak girl, after all. I should have gone away where you never

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could have found me again. I half believed you would come back; I half believed that something would arise to take this terrible cross from my shoulders; I could not bear to see the future so dark. Oh! in the name of God, if you believe in one, have mercy on me! Leave me to myself."

"You must understand me!" I cried. "This marriage was not of my seeking. It is not a marriage of love. I have made this woman my wife in nothing but in name. I have never spent an hour in her society since. If you had only said one encouraging word, only given me the faintest ray of hope that you loved me — "

She interrupted me with a fierce passion of words:

"Loved you! Have I not given everything in this world that a woman could possibly hold dear, for your sake? Have I not made of myself an outcast, sacrificed my whole life and all the pleasure in it for you? Oh, Ansel, Ansel, you have broken my heart!"

It was a cry of complete hopelessness. I stood deprived of all power of thought. I could not speak. My great-coat dropped to the floor. I sank upon the sofa beside her. She continued to sob hysterically.

"Amy," I whispered softly.

"Don't speak to me!" she burst out passionately. But if I had known that it would have sealed my doom, I could not have withstood the impulse that burned in me now; I caught her in my arms; I drew her head upon my breast. She resisted me violently

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at first, then feebly, then not at all. The sobbing became wilder, more spasmodic. All at once she reached up, threw her arms about my neck, and kissed me over and over again with a passion not less than my own.

A strange, impossible act! But it did not seem at all strange to me then. In the solemn hush of the many silent minutes that ensued, the profound certainty came to me, I know not how, that this dear head had rested upon my breast, many, many times before.

We entered into a trance, into that heaven of complete happiness forbidden to many, which the affinity of our two souls had made possible.

How long it lasted neither of us could tell. I was aware suddenly of a change. She had not moved; she seemed scarcely to breathe; she was so still that I was frightened. I endeavored to lift up her head to look into her face; her arms fell from my neck like a dead weight; I saw that she was no longer conscious. I arose hastily and applied restoratives. The signs of active life gradually returned.

All at once, with fresh alarm, I started back. Unexpected, unannounced, Miss Mowry had dashed into the room. I was unreasonably afraid of Mowry. She uttered a scream, ran to the side of her prostrate mistress, and began vigorously to slap her hands. When she saw that Miss Bueford was getting better, she turned upon me a face of fury. I stooped in trepidation and picked up my coat. I tried to expostulate, to get a hearing, but she poured

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forth such a tirade of invective and abuse, that it was some time before I could succeed. She insisted on my instant departure, and threatened to call a policeman if I remained. I seized a moment, when she paused for breath, to cry: "Miss Mowry, hear me! I insist that you shall hear me! I have in some way offended you; believe me, I don't know how. I beg you not to think me an enemy to Miss Bueford, — it is my memory that is at fault. If you knew what I had suffered! — I would do anything in the world for her sake; I would sacrifice my life for her!"

"Looks like it!" snapped Miss Mowry. "Are you going?"

My trembling fingers were in the pocket of my coat. I drew forth my pocket-book; there were several large bills in it; I tore them out; I fairly threw them at her.

"I will give you as much more as you can ask for," I said, "if you will hear me for a moment; if you will answer what I ask you; if you will give my message to her when she wakes." Miss Mowry put her hands on her hips; her face was scarlet; even her bonnet, perched wildly on the back of her head, was eloquent of war and defiance.

"I will give you my answer once and for all, Mr. Man," she vociferated. "If you should take all the money you ever heard of and rolled it all up together into a great round ball like the world, and got down on your miserable knees to give it to me, I wouldn't wink the corner of my eye for you. I

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might take it from the devil; I wouldn't from you, — not if I was starving. Now you've got it."

A faint moan from the sofa saved me from an ignominious retreat at that moment. Miss Mowry flew to the side of her charge. Suddenly, to my astonishment, she stooped and lifted the prostrate form in her arms with as much readiness as if it had been that of a baby, and staggering under the weight, for she was but a slight woman herself, before I could lift my hand to prevent her, had disappeared in the adjoining room. I did not dare to follow. In another minute the door shut, and I heard the key turn in the lock.

I stood irresolute, staring at the closed portal. Then I heard the voice of Miss Mowry speaking from the safe beyond:

"Miss Bueford wishes to inform you, my very dear sir, that you can stay there as long as you please, and make yourself as comfortable as you can. She is in the back room and is locked in behind three doors. If we stay here until we starve to death, we won't come out till you have gone away."

"For God's sake! will you not hear one word?" I pleaded, sobbing like a woman in my distress.

There was no reply. I heard the sound of a distant door shutting with a needless bang that shook the partition, and then came silence.

I turned, my heart beating with manifold emotions, my brain on fire, and staggered out into the night. I was not discouraged; I said to myself: "In the morning I will come back."

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CHAPTER III.

THE NIGHT.

ALTHOUGH I used all possible haste in procuring a carriage, and all possible persuasion to induce the driver to abbreviate the tedious time of passage, I heard the bells striking twelve long before I reached the house that looked out over the fields.

The snow had ceased to fall, but it was still very dark, and the wind blew clouds of the fine white granules into the faces of the few pedestrians. When I stepped from my carriage, I was myself obliged to bow before the blast. As I did so I felt something suddenly thrust into my hand. I was aware that a man had passed very near to me, but I was unable to discover anything further, beyond the fact that I held between the fingers of my glove a crumpled bit of paper.

After admitting myself to the house, I turned up the light that had been dimly burning in the hall, and stopped at the foot of the stairs to examine the missive which had thus strangely been given to me. It was an envelope securely sealed, and without superscription. It was wet and soiled, but there was still lingering about it a faint perfume which I knew too well. It was from Sidonie. It contained a brief

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note written in ink, and not without care, to the following effect:

My dear Husband, — Perhaps you do not think so, but you have behave cruel to me. After you have been told that which I have done was because of love, and because of love for your own self, how can you act to me this? But I have every excuse for you. You have been sick; you have been excited. I have not yet taken offence. I give you one more chance. But you know I have a bad temper. I do not advise you for you own sakes to disregard this that I tell you now. When you come into the room where I am, whisper to me, "Sidonie, I forgive you." I will tell you everything which I have kept from you, and we shall make it up all, and be happy together far away from this place. Will you not do this for the sake of me who adores you? Think, Ansel, think of it, I you implore, because if you do not I shall feel that between us two all is over, and we are two enemies, who once would have die for our sakes. I do not wish to be your enemy, but if I must fight you, I shall fight, how I can, and when I can. I am jealous like other women. Think over all about this. I rely on your honor to burn this, too, when it is read.

She who have not yet told her heart to hate you.

Burn it! Oh, yes, willingly! If in the blue and red flame that curled about that perfumed paper, which I flung hissing into the snow without, I could have seen destroyed all memory of the woman who had written the words upon it, with what eagerness would I have submitted to the sacrifice! Since I had felt upon my breast that little head which had seemed so familiar in the place, all thought of Sidonie had

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become positively painful to me. My only wish was to blot her out of my life as speedily as possible. No price which secured this result would seem too dear.

Love, passion, rage, forgiveness, hope, despair, were all struggling for the mastery within me as I climbed the stairs to my apartment. My mind was so active, so wild, so contradictory, so unintelligible to itself, that I was almost afraid of myself.

There were five people in the room when I opened the door: two lawyers, one of whom I did not know, Wayne, Sidonie, and, strangely enough, John Tum. It was his presence that, above everything else, impressed me. It made me angry. There was no formality about my entrance. The first thing that I saw was the deaf and dumb old man. The first thing that I said was:

"What is *he* doing here?"

Everybody looked at Sidonie. She was pale, her eyes were red, and she seemed unhappy. She arose from her chair and came very close to me. I could feel her excited breath on my face. Her expression was half an appeal, half a threat.

"Do you get my letter?" she whispered.

"Yes."

"Well, what do you say?"

"Nothing. I burned it." My answers were as stern as her questions were soft. She must have known my decision from my manner. She spoke then sullenly:

"Ver well, ver well, J. Tum, he stay; if you had forgive me, I would have sent him his ways."

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She went back to her chair, and sat with her eyes fixed immovably on me, as long as we were in the room together. I did not look at her, but I could not help feeling that gaze.

Then Wayne came and took my hand and spoke to me. I began to have some slight realization of my position, and I apologized for having kept them so long waiting.

"Isn't it rather late to go on now?" he questioned. "Hadn't we better postpone this matter to a fitter time and place?"

"I know no time and place fitter than the present," I answered. "Let it be here and now."

"Very well," said Wayne, "all the business remains to be done. We might have settled it long ago, but your wife refused to talk until you came. I presume you are ready now?" he added, turning to Sidonie. A dapper little man with a shrewd face got up and answered for her, with punctilious decorum.

"We are quite ready, *now*, Mr. Wayne, thank you."

A heavy reverberation reached our ears. We were in the front room, but we heard it very plainly. It came from the belfry of the church behind the house.

"One o'clock," remarked my lawyer. "We begin early in the morning."

A strange fancy, suggested by the hour and the place, came into my mind. I glanced at Sidonie. For the moment she was not looking at me. J.

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Tum was standing near her. His fingers were moving swiftly, and she was watching them. That mysterious alphabet again!

"Mr. Lewis does not desire to participate in the discussion," said Wayne. "Will you excuse us a moment?"

I followed him out of the room to the apartment in the rear, where we had conversed together on the day which had just gone. He turned up the light of the reading-lamp on the table and bade me sit down.

"My dear fellow," he said, "have you altered your mind at all in this matter of settling the property on your wife?"

"No, I am more desirous than ever to have her go where I shall never see her again. At any price, get her to sign a paper releasing me from all claims."

"As you will," said Wayne, "but I shall not consent to exorbitant demands without consulting you. This matter may take some time. When the document is ready, I will bring it here for you to sign. Meanwhile you may amuse yourself by looking over those papers of your uncle, which I left here this morning. As I said, there may be something among them that you may care to save."

We shook hands and he was gone. I could hear only the indistinct murmur of voices in the farther room. I looked mechanically at the bundle of documents which still lay on the corner of the table where Wayne had placed them; but it was only mechanically. Here was I, alone with my thoughts, in this most marvellous little room, for the first time since I

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had felt *her* kisses on my lips and held *her* face against my heart. Strange that it should be so, but it seemed to me that of all places this was the fittest in which to revive that entrancing memory; here in this mysterious chamber, which had always had such a sad, unexplained fascination for me, where I from the first had felt that wonderful impression of familiarity. That fascination and that impression were never stronger than to-night. More than all, they seemed in perfect harmony with thoughts of her. Yes, there was an affinity of association between all these — even with the bitterness of soul which arose from the knowledge of the loss that could never be replaced. And this seat before the table where I sat; ah, she was even here at my side! I looked about me. There were the fireplace, the pictures, the chairs, — how they almost talked of her! How it almost seemed as if she must be near at hand! How it almost seemed as if the sofa where I sat and held her head upon my breast must be that one by the window! Was it so indeed? Had I met her here and loved her here in the forgotten past? Oh, I could not tell! I could not tell!

The sense of my own helplessness, which this thought brought upon me, became so keen that I sought at last a refuge in my uncle's papers. I untied them and laid them out before me. I looked at the envelopes and the superscriptions, but I did not really see them. Wayne interrupted me in the midst of it by coming in. He sat down at my side and said to me, cautiously:

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"My dear fellow, there 's trouble."

"Well?"

"Well, it 's just as I was afraid it would be; she wants too much; she will not be satisfied with a reasonable thing. That deaf and dumb old man and she are in league against you, I tell you. I am not a fool, — at least I don't think I am, — and I am prepared to say that he dictates and she acts. The lawyer is a mere automaton, a mere blind. Tum and she have been exchanging covert signs all through the performance. Now what am I to do?"

"Give her what she asks."

"She asks for nearly half your convertible property! That is simply outrageous, after the infamous deception which has made you her husband."

"Nevertheless, give it to her."

"I can't do it."

"Then I shall," I said, coldly, rising from my chair.

"There! there!" exclaimed Wayne. "Sit down. Sit down. I'll try again."

He went out once more. The murmur of voices continued for a long time. I turned over the papers before me with a savage hand. All at once a bulky document slipped out from the rest; I saw my own handwriting; I saw the name Sidonie. I became interested. I spread it out and examined it. It was made up of several sheets of closely written paper bound together. It was addressed to my uncle. I began to read it. The first words dazed me. I was obliged to read one passage several times before I

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could really comprehend it. I became by turns dizzy, faint, beside myself. When it was all over, my throbbing temples sank upon my clinched hands resting on the paper. I do not know what my thoughts were; I hardly believe I had any. I only know that I suffered.

The sound of the opening door brought to me a flood of curious impressions, a strange somnambulistic activity which was hardly consciousness. I saw Sidonie advancing toward me alone. It was very natural to see her coming. I was expecting her. I rose up on my side of the table, and something seemed to fall from my hand with a sharp rattle to the floor. I realized a sudden intensification of despair. My heart felt a cruel pang. With hopeless, fearful vision I searched her face. It wore a mocking smile.

"She has sent you the ring by me, your sister," she said. "Hereafter it will be no more Amy, but Sidonie!"

There was a shining circle of gold between her thumb and finger. She held it toward me. It seemed no longer gaslight, but broad day. We were alone in the room. Nevertheless, I heard a voice saying to me: "If you wish to sign away half your property in favor of this woman, write your name there."

Then I felt something in my hand, — something which ought not to have been there, — something that was quite out of place. I was still looking at the ring.

The great bell of the church behind me struck

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twice. There was a sudden humming in my head. In an instant, the ring was gone; it was night again; the room was full of people; I had a pen in my hand; I was writing my name. The only thing that was real about my vision was Sidonie, who in verity stood before me. But the mocking smile? Ah! there was no smile at all, only a pale, frightened face and a trembling hand, — the hand that had just laid down the pen which I was using. And in that moment I knew her and all that she had been to me. I cried out like a madman, answering a question which still seemed echoing in my ears, from whence I knew not:

"No, no! I will not sign; take it away. This is not my wife! My poor, poor wife! What suffering! What misery!"

There was the echo of frightened voices; the vision of John Tum, the deaf and dumb old man, gesticulating wildly, and crying out in good French, "*C'est que je disais: il a joué un rôle!*" — "It is as I have said: he has been playing a part!" — and then, darkness!

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CHAPTER IV.

THE MORNING.

"THERE, there! Ansel, you feel better now, don't you? Of course you do."

Wayne was standing beside me. He looked as if he had not slept for a week; his hand which was touching me trembled. In all the years that I have known him, I never saw him betray evidence of such keen suffering as at that moment. I sat up on the sofa, taking the contagion of his distress.

"Sylvester, what is the matter? What frightens you?"

"Oh, my poor friend, do not take on in that way again!" he implored.

"How?"

Then I saw that there were others in the room. A grave-looking man, who I knew was the physician that had attended me at Sidonie's house, was sitting at the table writing; Sidonie's lawyer, the little man with the shrewd face, was there also; two muscular fellows, who seemed to have dropped in on business, were in the background. The room was in confusion. It was broad day. I did not know how these men had come there. I remembered only what had been before I lost consciousness when the bell struck.

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"Don't disturb the patient," said the physician, glancing rather ungraciously at Wayne.

"But see how much better he is!" pleaded my friend. The physician answered in a matter-of-fact tone:

"Sorry, but I have already made out the certificate. His wife's feelings are to be considered. You are simply a friend and have no particular interest in the matter, I take it."

I drew Wayne nearer to me and whispered:

"Who are these men?"

He avoided a direct answer; but their actions, the doctor's words, the scene itself, combined to force the truth upon me. I whispered again in my friend's ear:

"Wayne, answer me! Do they believe me insane?"

He looked at me with a face of mute anguish, and I knew that I had guessed the truth.

"Sylvester, what have I been doing?"

"Well, you haven't been quite yourself since last night."

"But I am now, my dear friend, I am now!"

Wayne's face glowed with the light of hope. He cried out earnestly:

"I knew it was only a temporary thing, a mere passing fit brought on by the overstrained condition of your mind. Don't be frightened; they shall not take you away. Even if they put you in an asylum, I will get you out again, if there is any law left; be sure of that."

"Asylum!" I gasped. "But I cannot! I must

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get up. It is absolutely necessary that I go to her at once." The physician ceased writing to give me a sharp look.

"Her! who?" he queried.

"My wife!" I cried, forgetting my situation at the recollection of the miserable, blind part I had been playing in the past three months. "It is necessary that I go to Brooklyn at once to see her. Or if not, you will oblige me by sending for her immediately. Her address is Amy Bueford, —— Street, Brooklyn."

I saw too late that I had made a mistake.

"That's enough," said the physician, shortly, turning back to his writing.

Wayne covered his face with both hands and fell to sobbing like a child.

"Wayne!" I whispered. "My dear friend! listen to me! I know what I tell you seems strange; but it is true. Amy is my wife."

He did not heed me. He had given me up. I shudder when I think what might have happened if, in that supreme moment, my fortitude had deserted me. We do not know what our resources are until the crisis pushes us to them. All at once I burst out with a laugh. Everybody looked at me.

"Really, gentlemen," said I, "this joke has gone far enough. If I have frightened you sufficiently, and you are ready to acknowledge that I am a tolerably good actor, I will confess: I have been playing a practical joke on Sidonie."

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My face was the focus of five pairs of astonished eyes. I went on carelessly:

"You don't believe me? Well, I can prove it to you without getting up. Among those papers which you have so kindly brushed from my table to the floor you will find the statement that I intended to play the joke, and my reasons for so doing."

Sidonie's lawyer at once began stir over the documents.

"My dear Wayne," I continued, "you know I don't care to have everybody prying into my family secrets. I want you to find that paper and read it. Your testimony ought to be sufficient. You will see it there, larger than the rest, several sheets of fine writing in my hand, bound together, without date line, and beginning, 'My dear Uncle.'"

"This is child's play," grumbled the physician.

But my friend was becoming hopeful again, and he was not to be diverted from his purpose. He searched the papers and found the letter which I had discovered among my uncle's documents the night before. He cried, excitedly:

"You see, gentlemen, he has told the truth! Here it is."

"Read it," I said. "These gentlemen will suspend operations while you do so."

I beckoned him to come nearer to me, and I whispered in his ear:

"Wayne, my Uncle Benjamin was reading that letter when he fell down. I am sure of it."

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My friend began at once to read. His excitement constantly increased. This was what he saw:

"MY DEAR UNCLE:

"I write to bid you a long farewell. Tired of living, I have resolved to take my own life. When the clock strikes two on the afternoon of the coming Friday I shall cease to live. At two minutes after two this letter will be in the post. I do not know whether you will hear of my death first from other sources, or whether this letter will inform you of it, but at any rate you will know that the voice that is speaking to you now comes from beyond the grave. I do not write to reproach you. You have taken the place of father to me. You have brought me up in the way which you believed to be for my own good, my own happiness. If I have not been happy, doubtless it was the fault of my own melancholy and unfortunate temperament. With another your experiment might have resulted differently. I am sorry that I cannot live to be a triumphant example of the practical outcome of your philosophy. I owe you much, I know, but I cannot think I owe you that. I have kept much from you. I now write to confess everything. I do not need to recall to you what my life has been. Since leaving Dr. Senegal, I have been trying to learn this lesson you taught me, of gratifying my own lawless fancies. I have been riding without curb or bridle in pursuit of a phantom. It took me some time to discover that it was a phantom. When I did, which

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was about two years ago, I became utterly miserable. Leaving happiness out of the question, I could not find even the satisfaction of excitement. What was I looking for in the world? I did not know. I only knew that there was a part of my life missing. I had sought in vain to fill the void with love that I could buy. Forgive me for saying it! I had but one real confidant and friend in the world, and he was a young man of my own age whom I met in college, — Mr. Wayne.

"At twenty-four I met Sidonie Lamonte. You know how and where. You know the outcome of that meeting. With your approval and advice I made Sidonie my wife, in fact, if not in name or in law. With your money I rented the expensive suite where she now is. I took Sidonie as a refuge. I thought I should escape everything, for I even fancied myself in love with her. She was brilliant, witty, and had a character and a novelty about her that made her intensely interesting to me. It is needless to trouble you with details. After six months with Sidonie I became as I was before; worse, — I felt utterly friendless and alone, utterly despondent and cast down. Often in the morning when I took up the paper and read of some poor fellow, who, weary of the monotony of existence, had taken his own life, I sighed to think how brave he was to face the grim alternative, and how cowardly I was who hesitated to thus secure my own release.

"And then, all at once, a great, overwhelming change came into my life. I was so full of new emotions I could hardly breathe. Do you take no account,

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in your philosophy, of real, disinterested, irresistible affection, which springs up sometimes between a man and a woman; not between any man and any woman, but between one man and one woman? You know that women were not strangers to me. It was hardly to be expected that the society of one could inspire me with any unfamiliar sentiments. But from the moment I came into the presence of Amy Bueford, I was no longer what I had been. Life grew to be very dear; the hours, which before I could not waste fast enough, became so precious I could not bear to see them speeding by so quickly. For the first time a pure, deep, disinterested affection had possession of me. It was all the stronger because all my life I had been a stranger to such things; because I had never felt it before; because of the very half-hearted associations which you thought would take it away.

"When I have told you the story of my connection with Amy Bueford, I have written all I have to write. I met her two months ago at the house of your tenants at Winterside, where I went, at your request, to look after the mortgage business. It is only two months, but in this time I have met her, loved her, won her love, married her, and separated from her, —a lifetime in a few weeks. It is only two months, and because of her I am about to blow out my silly brains.

"Now, at last, you can understand my curious conduct of the past few weeks. You can understand why I wrote that letter telling you that I wished to marry, and asking your permission. Coward! I had

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already been married then two weeks. It came about in this way: After I first saw Miss Bueford I could not remain easy out of her presence. I soon learned who she was. She was the only daughter of a fond, but unfortunate father, who had been utterly ruined by speculation, and took his own life in a fit of insanity; leaving her, at the age of nineteen, to battle with the world. She was a lady in every sense of the word,— educated, cultured, refined. I won't attempt to tell you her story; it had been with her a struggle for respectability, for honor, and at last, for bread. She fled from the worse than treachery of a relative of her father, in whose house she had been offered protection; and when I knew her she was teaching French to the children in the family of your tenants. Knowing the danger that I ran of having my secret disclosed to you, I took good care, after I found what my feelings for Miss Bueford were, to keep it from the eyes of the people in the house.

"Fortunately, a domestic excitement there at that time made my task less difficult than it might have been. A diamond had been stolen from the lady of the house. As you know, she is an invalid, whimsical, unreasonable, and despotic. She accused one of the servants of the theft. The poor creature she suspected, Miss Mowry, I think her name was, a harmless, well-meaning soul, who must have been entirely guitless of the theft, was protected by Miss Bueford, whose good heart could not see this injustice done. If she had only interfered, it would not have been so bad, but she proved that Miss

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Mowry's cause was just. This was an unpardonable offence in the eyes of the woman I speak of. In a fit of rage she dismissed every servant in the house, and she included Miss Bueford in that category.

"I mention this episode, not for any intrinsic importance, but because it created the opportunity which brought me very near to Miss Bueford. I offered her my assistance. She accepted it. I told you that I became a new being when I fell in love — I do not like the phrase — when I completed my life; and I had the immeasurable joy of knowing that my coming had made the world assume a new radiance in her sight. I told her with my eyes, the first time we ever stood face to face, that I loved her, and read her reply in her shy, tremulous glances; in two days I told her with my lips; in a week I offered her the best protection I could give her, — marriage. Oh, I was mad! I might have known that my past life had rendered me unworthy of her. Instinctively I did know it, but I crushed the feeling down. With the certainty of your disapproval hanging over me, I ought not to have refrained from revealing the whole situation to her. I ought to have treated her, at any cost, as became an honest man. That warning of conscience I crushed down, too. I crushed down everything that stood in my way, and justified myself by the knowledge of the grand purpose which henceforth must make me worthy of love in the eyes of such a woman as she, — the complete abandonment of the old life and the old associations. Yes, in the midst of all the fever, and the whirl of events, I said

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that to myself. The resolution of a day it was truly, but I know that a lifetime would not have seen it broken.

"I was so fearful that something should cheat me of the great prize I had resolved at all hazards to make mine, that I made it an absolute secret. I was so afraid that I might receive advice contrary to my wishes, that I refrained from informing even my tried friend Wayne of my plans. I asked her if she believed in me? What a needless question! Then I said there was something that I could not tell her till after our marriage; something which would not interfere with our happiness required that our marriage should be kept secret for a time. With reluctance at first, and hardly reassured by my protestations, she agreed. In one thing I was just to her. She believed me a poor man. She accepted me for myself only.

"Then all was arranged. We left Winterside separately, by different trains, in order that nothing might be suspected and rumor of the truth come to your ears. We met in the depot at New York; we took a carriage and drove to a hotel. I obtained for Miss Bueford a room where she lived in seclusion for a week, while I could complete the few arrangements that were necessary for our marriage. I got my permit at the office of the city registrar, obtaining from the clerk the promise that my name would not be taken by the newspapers. I rented a small suite in a new house in the extreme upper end of the city, and there I took my sweet young bride. Here I am writ-

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ing this letter to you now. We were known, and still are, as Mr. and Mrs. Howland. Was this not folly, and worse than cowardice in me? But I have richly paid the penalty. I did not see the matter in its proper light then. If I acted the unmanly part of the deceiver, it was partly because I was determined that my wife's pure ears should never be soiled with the story of my past. I doubted not that she would hold me in contempt.

"I had made three grave mistakes in my mad haste: before I married her, I ought to have determined to do it openly and before all the world; I ought to have informed you; I ought to have dismissed Sidonie. I had done not one of these things; I was afraid of the world; afraid of you; afraid of Sidonie. The time for action had come; it was imperative that something should be done at once. I sought the advice of my friend Wayne. He was unfortunately in Baltimore. I was left to my own cowardly expedients and course of action; I feared to meet you; I feared to meet my mistress. I wrote to both of you letters which I destroyed. Then, at last, I ventured to send you a timid inquiry as to what your views would be if I married. I told you that I had met a pure and beautiful woman, that I loved her, and that I was sure I could not find such happiness anywhere else in the world, as in the pride and joy of calling myself her husband. You know how you answered that. You asked me to insult her; you told me if I married her, I must hope for no further assistance from you. What could I do? Work and support

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my wife? I did not know how to do anything useful. I had spent my life in what you would call 'gratifying' myself. I was not an adept at any other profession. And so I mistrusted myself. Weak, vacillating, undecided, I felt myself, even in the first days of my married life, slipping back into the old despondency, the old gloom, out of which I imagined I had escaped forever. I had not even written to Sidonie. I thought I would wait until Wayne came home, confess everything, and take his advice. I wrote to him, telling him I was in great trouble, and asking him to come to me soon as he could.

"All this time Sidonie's alarm and jealousy were increasing. I have since had reason to believe that she had me watched, to find out how I was conducting myself.

"Then one night she was hidden in the hallway near my door when I went in. My young wife sprang to meet me before the door was fairly closed behind me. Somebody pushed it open and came in. I turned and saw a woman closely veiled. My conscience told me who it was before she spoke.

"It is needless to dwell upon that disgusting scene. It is enough for you to know that Sidonie went out of the house convinced that Amy was my wife, and that the pure Amy saw her go convinced that she was my sister, — a sister who, owing to the accidents of our childhood, had been reared in France. A miserable, sneaking lie! But what else could I do? How else was I to act in such an emergency?

"I had one other interview with Sidonie at her own

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house. The scene between us was not as stormy as I had anticipated. Yet there was something about this enigmatical French girl that made me afraid. I believe I never thoroughly understood her. When the interview came to an end I bade her good by. I said, 'It is not probable that we shall ever meet again.' She would only smile and say, '*Au revoir*.' I felt then that it was not easy for a man to escape all at once from his past.

"While I was yet trembling, hesitating still to make my wife my confidante, yet fearful of the possible consequences of my silence, I saw that she, too, had changed, that she was troubled in her mind, that she wept much when alone. I did not ask her the cause. I thought I thoroughly understood it.

"Last week — I shall not forget the day nor the hour; it was Friday and nearly two o'clock — I met my wife at the foot of the stairs, coming out as I was going in from the street. She seemed disturbed to meet me. She shrank away from me. Hurriedly she told me, when I questioned her, that she was going out on an errand, and when I proposed to accompany her she said it was a little surprise for me and she begged me not to come. 'Go up to the little home which you have made for me, and where we have been so happy,' she said. 'You will find a letter there for you.'

"I shall not forget those words, nor the tone and manner in which they were said, until I hear the fatal bell in the church behind me sounding the hour of two.

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"I did not seek for an explanation. I went up quickly. With nervous haste I unlocked the door. I saw the white edge of the missive on the centre table. I drew it out. I saw it superscribed with my name in the delicate handwriting of my wife. I felt through every fibre of my being when I laid my hand upon that bit of paper that it concealed a horror. I stood holding it, looking at it, afraid to open it, helpless. The great clock of the church behind the house struck two. I broke the seal and read:

My Husband, — A last, long farewell! Where I have gone you cannot follow me. The law may compel me to be your wife; it cannot compel me to live with you as your wife. I have determined never to do that. Do you ask me why? Look into your own conscience for the answer. Your *sister* has told me who she is. She has a prior claim on you which I have no wish to dispute. I know what your past has been. If you had learned *that* about *me*, would you not say I was unfit to be your wife? In my code of morality there is no distinction between the obligations of the man and the wife. I do not reproach you. I only say good by. I have learned this all at once. I have acted suddenly. Perhaps I shall repent. Perhaps I do not know my own heart. I shall give myself a week to think of it. After a week, if I do not come back you must cease to think of me. I can no longer sign myself as your wife. I have taken back the name you robbed me of.

Amy Bueford.

"It was incredible! Impossible! It was utterly unlike my gentle wife as I had thought her. Yet here it was. She herself had told me to look for it. My folly had done its work.

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"Since that time I have not eaten or drank. It was nearly a week ago. There is no possibility that she will come back. At first I could not believe it. It seems most natural now. Still, I shall wait out the week. When the clock strikes two on Friday, if she has not come, I shall wait no longer. My revolver is in the drawer of the table on which I write, where I can reach it at any moment. I shall eat and drink now, in order that my hand may be steady.

"Again I say that I do not reproach you; it was not your philosophy so much as my own unfortunate inherited disposition, my own foolishness, my own cowardice. It is needless to say more. Perhaps you can understand my feelings from what I have written. I fear it is not clear. I have a swimming in my head at times, which makes me think I am hardly myself. Forgive me if I have made you suffer; I have told the story not at all with that design. I have suffered much myself.

"Your nephew,

"A. LEWIS."

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CHAPTER V.

THE NIGHT AGAIN.

WHEN Wayne had read this letter to the end, he dashed it upon the floor, and actually before them all, embraced me. Then turning to his auditors, he said:

"Gentlemen, he has explained everything. I will vouch for this man's sanity."

The physician answered impatiently, and not without a slight display of temper:

"Unfortunately, I am not able to take your word in this matter. Where is the proof of it?"

"There will be plenty of that in time," said Wayne, with his old buoyancy.

"His wife's wishes in the case certainly ought to be considered," grumbled the physician. "Let me question him again."

"I shall answer no questions," I returned. "It is a practical joke on my part. I have told you so. My friend has vouched for me. You don't dare imprison me after that."

"Hum! ha! perhaps not," said the physician, clearly annoyed. He turned to Wayne:

"I will tell you what I will do," he said. "I will leave these men here, and will hold this certificate in

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abeyance until this matter can be settled. But as I am responsible for Mr. Lewis's safe-keeping, he must not go from this room. These men will see to that."

I was about to make a vigorous remonstrance, but Wayne restrained me. He accepted the compromise. The doctor and the lawyer went away; the two keepers stepped into the adjoining room. Wayne and I were alone. He turned to me excitedly:

"To think that you had forgotten all about this!" he exclaimed; "it is quite past my comprehension. If my most trusted friend had told me such a story, I should have pitied him for his credulity."

"Now, at last, I can understand my feeling for this house," I reflected, looking about me with deep emotion. "Wayne, it was here that I brought her, an innocent, trusting girl. It was in this room that I read the letter that spoiled my life. It was at this table that I sat waiting for the bell to strike. I was not responsible for what I did; I had eaten nothing for days; I think I must have been somewhat out of my head; but I know that I sat here with my revolver in my hand, waiting for the clock to sound the hour of two, my eyes fixed upon the face of my watch, where the little hand was so swiftly switching away the few remaining seconds. I had left the outer door open because I thought perhaps she might come at the last moment, and feel a little hesitancy about coming in; and at the last somebody did enter. I had a throb of hope so great that it nearly killed me. The woman was veiled. Sylvester, I believe it was done purposely, to make me suffer more. She kept

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me in suspense as long as it was possible, and then I saw Sidonie's face. I stood up on my side of the table. She approached me with a mocking smile, and held out to me a little band of gold, — my poor wife's wedding ring. 'She has sent you the ring by me, your sister,' she said; 'hereafter it will be no more Amy, but Sidonie.' Then the clock struck two. I cannot say what happened after that. I seemed to awake, after an indistinct dream, in bed in the doctor's house at Bromberg."

"Marvellous!" cried Wayne; "incredible! To think that I stood here last night, and saw it all, and never dreamed of its significance. Sidonie insisted on bringing that paper to you herself. She came in ahead of us, and advanced to the table; you rose up just as you have described; she held the paper toward you just as she must have held the ring at that other time; the bell struck two just as it must have struck then; and but for our presence, that former scene between you must have been almost exactly reproduced last night. I don't wonder they think you insane. It is all so far out of the ordinary! I confess I cannot understand it now. There is yet much to be learned. The people who rented this house when you were here moved away while we were in California. I must look them up."

"It ought to seem clear enough now, this story of mine," I faltered doubtfully. "Perhaps it is my head; I cannot understand it any better than before. It's a sad, an awful muddle! Wayne, I must make a confession, — I have been beseeching Miss Bueford

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to marry me, since we met her that afternoon in the park."

He suddenly turned away his head. The tone in which he replied was not wholly steady.

"Your own wife too! It is strange."

"Strange? It is horrible! I can understand so clearly now what before often puzzled me,—the feeling of love for her which swept over me with such sudden and mysterious power, when we met her that Sunday in the park, was only the dormant memory of the old passion struggling for recognition. I felt the impression; I did not know its cause. It seemed very strange at first; after a while I had thought about her so much, and she had become such a familiar being, that it was no longer possible to distinguish between the feelings that were new and those that were old; and so I began to persuade myself she was really a stranger to me! And, Wayne, what a horrible, unpardonable scoundrel I have made of myself in her eyes! She believes me a heartless monster; she—oh! I cannot understand it! there is nothing possible about it at all! I feel as if I had just awakened from a nightmare."

Wayne shuddered.

"So do I," he murmured. Then he spoke with sudden energy. "But we shall know more about it in a few hours."

He seized his hat.

"Where are you going?"

"To Mrs. Lewis!" he cried, "the real one!"

How odd his eyes looked! I could almost believe he had been shedding tears.

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It was morning when Wayne left me. When the early darkness of the winter evening had made it necessary to light the gas, he had not yet returned. To say that his prolonged absence worried me does not do justice to my feelings. It was unbearable enough to be shut up like a criminal in my room at such a time; it was torture enough in itself to feel that I was powerless when so much was at stake, that the most delicate mission of my life had been delegated to another. The unaccountable delay made me fairly wild; I tried to bribe my keepers to free me, but they would not listen. I tired myself out in my ceaseless pacing of the floor.

He came at last. The pallor of his face and the wildness of his eyes told me that something serious was the matter; he sank into a chair without speaking. Poor fellow! he seemed utterly exhausted.

"She despises me!" I cried. "I know it; she gives me up; she refuses to see me again!"

He shook his head.

"No? But she must have made you some answer. She ——"

He interrupted me: "I have not seen her."

"Not seen her! Where is she?"

"Gone! without saying a word, without leaving a trace. Read that."

He handed me this letter:

My dear Friend, — How can I ever thank you sufficiently for what you have done for me? I was a poor girl, without friends, in trouble, and you saved me from much suffering, asking nothing in

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return, not even putting questions to me, because your rare delicacy told you they would distress me. For your noble generosity and disinterested friendship, I shall think of you always with the deepest respect and gratitude. I have seen so much of perfidy and heartlessness in men, that I sometimes think heaven must have thrown you into my way to let me see that they are not all bad. It is a poor return, I know, to go away and not bid you good by, nor tell you where I am going; but I have been so persecuted here by one who has wronged me beyond the possibility of reparation, that I am forced to give up everything and go where he can never find me. If you will return the enclosed to its address, you will do me the greatest of all favors. Believe me, I shall always hold you in the kindest remembrance.

Your ever, ever grateful friend,

AMY BUEFORD.

"And here," said Wayne, "is the enclosed."

It was an envelope containing the money with which I had endeavored to bribe Miss Mowry, the night before, and a slip of paper upon which were written these words:

"For every kiss that I gave you in my insanity to-night I shall do bitter penance. I hope God may pardon you for the wrong you have done me. Perhaps some day I can bring myself to say that I forgive you; but now, it seems as if that were impossible. When you first came to me I thought I would try to keep the promise I had made you and remain as a stranger even to you; but your unmanly conduct rendered it impossible. To others I will still keep your secret. I shall pray God that we two may never meet again."

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"O Wayne! Wayne!" I cried, "what does she mean? What *can* she mean?"

"Clearly, that your sister Sidonie has stooped to some very unsisterly deception. Amy never wrote the letter you received. She never could have written it. Imagine the most punctilious bride in the world, who loved her husband sufficiently to trust him, as this girl trusted you, forsaking him because she discovered he had been leading a rather free life before he married her! It is preposterous! There! you are losing that letter; if you don't mind, I would like to keep it. It was written to me."

He spoke with much diffidence, though I hardly perceived it. Mechanically I gave him the letter. I did not notice it then, but I remembered long afterwards how he folded it up and put it tenderly away.

"Do you think Sidonie has deceived her about something? What could she have told her?" Wayne frowned and shook his head.

"I don't know. I cannot even guess. We must find that out. That is—my—oh, my dear friend, how *can* I tell you? The very worst has happened!"

I repeated his words helplessly.

"The very worst!"

"You must hear it sooner or later. If I don't tell you, somebody else will, and very shortly."

"Go on, my friend, go on. I am listening."

"Now, you remember what I told you the other day, that half of what I had was yours, always, on demand, whenever you might feel disposed——"

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I interrupted him. "The Crooke property——"

"Is gone."

I cannot say that the news did not shock me some, coming upon me thus suddenly.

"Then Mrs. Crooke——" I faltered.

"Was really Mrs. Crooke in verity," he went on. "She came this morning, and everybody recognizes her. It is all over town."

"That will not prevent us from knowing from Sidonie how I have been deceived," I said, after an inward fever.

"My dear friend," Wayne answered me, "that woman had no interest in you, outside of what your wealth could give her. Sidonie and the man they call John Tum were seen at the Central Depot at four o'clock. They will not come back."

"John Tum again!" I ejaculated. "Does he go with her everywhere? Who is that man?"

"Her husband."

I staggered as if some one had dealt me a heavy blow. I sank into a chair.

"Wayne, my friend," I said, with the earnestness of a man who speaks from the heart, "I am going to find my wife. When I have found her, if she cannot give me her hand and say to me that this world is not all a whited sepulchre, that life is worth the labor of the lungs that keep it going, as I am a living man, I will carry out the good resolution I once made beside this table, and with my own hand open the door to that eternal mystery that rids us of the earth."

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PART IV.—MR. WAYNE'S NARRATIVE.

CHAPTER I.

SIDONIE PLANS.

I WISH you could know my friend, Mr. Ansel Lewis, as I know him. He is a fine fellow, kind, generous, sympathetic to the last degree. He has just one fault, as I always told him, which has pretty nearly been the death of him, and that is what I call a lack of backbone. I think that phrase is sufficiently established in our vernacular for you to know what I mean without further explanation. But I do not appear before you to praise or criticise. I have a duty to perform, and I shall proceed to do it in the fewest possible words. I shall call your attention to two scenes, in which I participated shortly after my friend's release from the restraint which his insane conduct had caused to be placed upon him, and then I shall leave him to finish his own story.

My friend for the last few days has been rushing about the country in a half-frantic and unsystematic search for his lost wife, and at half past nine o'clock in the evening I am sitting alone in my writing-room. Somebody pulls the bell of my suite: I go

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to the door, and there stands the pale and dissipated Fred Mulcher. Now, I am not an entire stranger to Mulcher, as my friend has told you, and as a matter of course I ask him in.

"Hardly expected to see me, I suppose," he says, in a manner which is meant to be decidedly nonchalant, but which really is a trifle nervous.

"However that may be, Mr. Mulcher," I say, "now that I do see you, I expect to be very much enlightened about something. The first time you honored me with a visit, I was kindly asked to take charge of the wife of a friend of mine, without a word of explanation as to who she was; the next time I was mysteriously informed that John Tum was the American name of a man who was wanted by the French police, and that Sidonie was his wife; and now I suppose you are about to tell me what your connection with these adventurers is, and why the deuce you refrained from mentioning that Miss Bueford was Mrs. Lewis?"

"'Pon my soul," returns Mr. Fred Mulcher with earnestness, "I did not know anything about it; and as for my connection with these people, or *one* of them only, Mr. Wayne, I beg of you not to go into that matter at all; it is something that I feel very sensitive about, Mr. Wayne, — very sensitive indeed."

"My dear Mulcher," I say, with a seriousness that puzzles him, "I wouldn't shock your sensibilities for the world. Now, what can I do for you?"

Mr. Mulcher then becomes confidential.

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"Mr. Wayne," he says, "I don't care for anything but your word of honor. Your word of honor is as good as Jay Gould's signature any day, and any *where*."

"Why, really, Mr. Mulcher," I answer, "you flatter me greatly. When one can get such praise from such an authority, one cannot be said to have lived in vain."

Mr. Mulcher doesn't seem to understand that exactly, but he continues:

"The lady whom I represent desires an interview with you; and because she feels a little fear that undue advantage might be taken of her if she came unprotected, she wants the protection of your word that she may go and come undisturbed and absolutely unknown to anybody but yourself."

"And pray what lady do you represent, Mr. Mulcher?"

"Sidonie Lamonte."

"And she wants to see me?"

"Exactly."

"Where?"

"Here."

"When?"

"To-night."

"Mr. Mulcher," I say, after a moment's hesitation; "you may bring her. The promise of protection on my part does not extend beyond the bounds of this single interview."

"Thank you," says Mr. Mulcher, "I knew you would. Exceedingly obliged!"

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Mr. Mulcher has been gone but ten minutes by my watch when I admit a woman, closely veiled, to my apartment. She greets me with as much enthusiasm as if I were her long-lost brother, and cries out:

"Oh, *mon cher* Monsieur Wayne! I have to thanks you from the profundity of my soul!"

"Don't weary yourself, I beg of you, my dear madame," I return, "by bringing your thanks from such a supernaturally long distance. Pray be seated. Er — do you smoke? Have a cigar, pray do."

She appears more puzzled at my politeness than her less acute but more American representative was a few minutes ago. Nevertheless, she accepts the proffered chair by my table, and lifts her veil. She looks as fresh and sparkling as she did when Lewis first introduced her to me many months ago.

"I thanks you, Monsieur Wayne," she says. "Cigarettes, sometimes; cigars, not at all; and as for now I have business, not pleasures."

"Oh, now you do not have pleasures but business! How unfortunate!"

She is not looking at me, but about the apartment.

"How nice you have make everything to yourself here, Monsieur Wayne," she remarks. "Was it that I was a man, now, this is how I would be — *bachelier — vie douce!*"

"Oh, yes, very comfortable, I assure you! And for the sake of my friend I wish you *had* been a man, too. But you weren't, you see, and as a consequence, you've played the deuce with him. Now if it

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wouldn't be impertinence on my part, I should like to ask you by what artifice you have alienated his wife from him. I don't want to be over-curious, but I may be in your line myself one of these days, and it would come in rather handy to know."

She watches my face closely as I speak, and bursts into a little peal of laughter at the close.

"And what ees my line, Monsieur Wayne?"

"Oh, I don't desire to be at all personal!" I reply, evasively.

"I have always thought, Monsieur Wayne," she says, with an insinuating smile, "that my line ees to make loave and nothing else. But navaire mind, navaire mind, I do not come for that."

"Oh! you do not come for that? You distress me! Would it be inhospitable to ask you what you *did* come for?"

"Well just now, Monsieur Wayne, I was admiring the place where you live," she returns, still smiling and making, as Tennyson says, wicked lightnings with her eyes. "You have so many portières and no doors, I feel just almost at home. You like to have me feel at home with you, do you not, Monsieur Wayne?"

"Oh, certainly! of course! oh, yes! Feel at home as much as you like, only don't carry anything away."

"I swear to you I will carry not one thing away," she returns, with imperturbable good-humor. "Why ees it that you have the portières together, *renfermées?* What ees behind them? Will you let me see?"

"By all means," I reply, rising at once. "The

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rooms are entirely free of listeners, if that is what you suspect."

The room in which we sit is at the end of my suite. There are apartments opening off to the right and at the back. There are no doors, but heavy curtains hanging in the wide entrances between the rooms. I step first to the curtain at the back and draw it aside; she follows me closely, and peers curiously over my shoulder into the chamber beyond.

"And thees othair?" she insinuates, with a nod of her head toward the room on the right.

"Is quite as empty," I answer, crossing the room and drawing aside that curtain also. She is still at my side.

"And thees window?" she continues, pointing to one at the back of the chamber into which we are looking. "Does that afford you fine views, Monsieur Wayne?"

"Charming!" I return; "it is only three feet to the blank wall of the next house. I often spend hours luxuriating in that view."

"Fire escapes, I suppose," she continues, "by which one may descend?"

"Yes, and jump twelve feet to the ground; for my part, I always use the stairs."

"I was only thinking of the thiefs, Monsieur Wayne. Do they navaire visits you at all?"

"Navaire! — upon my word."

She passes back to the first curtain and begins to feel of its texture.

"Really, Monsieur Wayne," she says, "it ees too

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bad that you must use those heavy materials. Lace would be so charming, now; would it not, Monsieur Wayne?"

"Well, really," I answer; "you are going a good deal into detail for one who was so very full of business a moment ago."

"Do you think so?" she returns, with a saucy glance, and a renewal of her mysterious smile. "But really, I am so distress about that lace curtain!"

"I'm *very* sorry it isn't lace; and really, if it were not so near midnight, I might be tempted to send out and get one for you."

"Oh, *merci*, *merci*! monsieur; to-morrow will make no difference; *mais* — you must have the lace curtain. *Pourquoi?* Well, I tell you. There ees our positions with each othair, monsieur. You want somethings from me, and I want somethings from you; we will make the exchange, will we not?"

"Perhaps so. What do I want from you?"

"Ver much, monsieur; you want what lies I have told to the woman of your friend, and where that woman ees all thees time, and what make all the troubles — *bref*, everythings I know."

"I can't deny that this might have some interest to me, especially as to where Mrs. Lewis now is. What do you want from me?"

"Your confidence, Monsieur Wayne, and the protections of a gentleman."

"Well, isn't there a good deal of latitude about that?"

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"Pairhaps, monsieur, pairhaps. Now, listen to thees. I will write a little name and *nombre* for you; that will be where you find the woman of your friend. Then I will make a confession to you of all that I have done, and you will make of it fine English on the paper with your pen. Then I will stay with you in your house and nobody will know where I am. To-morrow, you will buy the lace curtain and thus improve greatly your apartment. If anybody should come, I will be always in the *chambre* behind the heavy *portière* and no one shall know. If it ees impossible to keep out some person, I will myself get out of the windows on the fire escapes and thus deceives them. Then, when you can, you will go right away to find the woman of your friend, and that othair who attends on her. You have great influence *there* I was told, Monsieur Wayne. They will come and they will be put in that *chambre* behind the lace curtain. Notice, Monsieur Wayne, that when the light be made here, and it be dark there, they two can see everything. All there will be blind to you who sit here. Then in the evening you will bring your friend, and it ees by your honor that I know he shall navaire know that I am here. Then on this table with him you may read to him that which I have said to you. After a while they will all go away. For myself, I will not wait. When I am done I shall go by the fire escapes. That is everythings that I will ask, Monsieur Wayne."

"Madame, the simplicity and the modesty of your

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request surprises me, and I am very sorry to be obliged to ask you for an explanation."

"What explanation?" she demands, as if none were necessary.

"Well," I say, "to be candid with you, I can't, for the life of me, see what this is all about."

"I will tell you, Monsieur Wayne," she answers me, with a sudden display of emotion, "what thees ees all about. It ees all about that I loave thees friend of which I speak to you. It is all about that he have forgot Sidonie. I am jealous, like othair women. I have done that which othair women would have done to bring him back when he would not come. But now — now I see it ees no longer possible to doubt. He will nevaire come back to me, nevaire, nevaire!"

She weeps. It seems unnatural, but it is so. Poor girl, have I misjudged her completely in the past?

"And what do you anticipate the effect of reading your confession will be upon my friend and his wife?" I question.

"When you know what I will tell you, Monsieur Wayne, you will no longer doubt. It will make them ver, ver happy. As to me — *eh bien!* what difference is that to anybody?"

"Sidonie Lamonte," I say, earnestly, "people *have* attributed to you mercenary motives in the affair with my friend."

Her eyes blaze with indignation. "You know me ver little, Monsieur Wayne," she declares, "or you

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navaire would say such things to me. I could not escape away from J. Tum; you may have heard about that one; much that I did because he told me, 'You go do it!' So now I have escape him. But you are not intent. I just ask you, now, Monsieur Wayne, whether you have decide to buy that lace curtain, *demain?*"

"What possible satisfaction can it be for you to witness this reconciliation?" I exclaim, quite taken aback and bewildered; all my former ideas of the woman who sits before me vanishing under the magnetism of her presence and the logic of her declarations.

"Satisfaction!" she echoes. "Will I not see his happiness? It will be bitterness with me, but what does that matter? When you have read it all he will say: 'What a fool I was! If I knew where she were!' Then you will pull the lace curtain and say: '*Eh bien! monsieur, voila!* Behold!' That will be a fine scene, will it not? And when I have seen enough, and weeps to myself, I will go away. Now, Monsieur Wayne, have you decide?"

"My dear girl," I say, wholly disarmed, "if you confess to me what I clearly see must be the truth, I will do anything that you ask of me."

"Ver well, monsieur," she says, with a little sigh of relief. "Take your pen and write."

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CHAPTER II.

SIDONIE REVENGES HERSELF.

THE lights burn brightly in my writing-room. The heavy folds of the Turcoman curtains in front of me hang with a listless languor that conveys no suspicion of a concealed presence. At the left, the curtains of lace, prettily draped, offer no obstruction to a view of the room beyond. The clocks have just struck seven. After an absence of several hours, I am entering my suite. Behind me are two women, one young and timid, the other old and curious.

I usher them in as a gentleman should. I wave my hand with intended grace towards the inner chamber, beyond the curtains of lace, which has been made to look as attractive as possible.

"That apartment, ladies," I say, "is at your disposal. As I shall ask you to spend the evening with me, you had better lay aside your outer garments there."

"But will you not tell us, now?" Miss Bueford appeals. "Is this air of mystery necessary? I have trusted to your honor, Mr. Wayne. How much longer will you keep me in suspense?"

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"Not one moment longer than is necessary, Miss Bueford."

"Mr. Wayne," she continues, tremulously, "I feel very greatly in your debt, but in my battle with the world I have been so often cruelly deceived by those I trusted most, that you must forgive me if I refuse positively to go one step farther until you have somewhat explained yourself."

"Miss Bueford, I will do so in a very few words. I have brought you here to prove to you that you have been cruelly deceived and wronged; that you are laboring under a grave mistake about something that is decidedly essential to your future happiness."

"I do not understand."

"You will thoroughly understand in a very short time. I desire to let you and Miss Mowry seat yourselves in that room. I shall then put out the light there, or turn it very low, leaving the light in this room at the full. Then I propose to draw those lace curtains which you see there. You will readily perceive that while it will be absolutely impossible to see from this room into that, it will be only necessary to look to see from that room everything that goes on here. After you have concealed yourself, I propose to bring a friend of mine, who will have no idea of your presence, into this room, and read to him a document which has been handed to me. He will sit here by this table; I will place him so that you may have a full view of his face, and judge of his emotions for yourself."

"The man's name?" demands Miss Bueford.

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"Ansel Lewis."

Miss Bueford utters a slight scream. "Mr. Wayne, I trusted you, but you have shamefully deceived me!"

"Miss Bueford, I will give you my word of honor that Mr. Lewis is not in my confidence in this matter; that I am acting entirely on my own responsibility; that he does not have and will not have the slightest idea that you are within a hundred miles of New York; and that, unless you so choose, he shall never know that you were sitting this night so close to him."

Miss Bueford looks into my face steadily, and then she suddenly puts her little hand into mine.

"Mr. Wayne," she says, "I will still trust you. Whatever your reasons for your mystery, I am sure they are honest and honorable ones. I know you are a friend. You have set for me the most painful task that it is possible for me to perform, but I will do it, because I believe in you."

An hour later the lace curtains are drawn, the rear chamber is as silent and dark as if only the furniture occupied it, and I am ushering in my friend Lewis.

"In the name of goodness, Wayne," he asks, as he removes his hat and gloves, "what is all this mystery about? Why were you so confoundedly uncommunicative when you made this appointment?"

"Because," I reply, "I wanted to make sure that you would come. Sit down at the table; I wish to talk with you. You look tired."

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"Tired! I am wretched."

He seats himself beside the table, his haggard face, lit up by the strong light, turned, as fate wills it, directly toward the lace curtain. I acknowledge a feverish excitement. There is something wonderfully impressive about his situation and mine, that I had not anticipated. With what ingenuity this affair has been planned! I have a sudden admiration for the silent woman behind the heavy folds in front of me, whose presence I alone know.

"Wayne, is there yet any trace of my poor wife?" my friend asks me, in a hopeless tone.

"My dear boy," I return, "I don't want to raise any false hopes in you, but I really think I have discovered a very important clew."

Lewis becomes excited at once.

"Now, that won't do at all," I tell him. "If you are going to examine into this matter with me, you must have patience, for it is a long process, and as I wish you to follow me step by step, I shall begin way back at the beginning."

"Of course!" he says impatiently, — "of course! I don't object, so long as you begin at once."

"And I must begin," I say, seating myself at the table opposite the heavy curtains, "by calling your attention to some of the leading facts of your own late history."

He looks somewhat surprised, but raises no objection, and I proceed to make as brief and succinct a statement of the important events of the last five years of his life, so far as I am acquainted with them,

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as I know how to present. Several times he interrupts me, with impatient exclamations, and demands of what all this has to do with the present emergency. Several times, too, my rather over-sensitive ear is startled by what seem to me most injudiciously loud noises behind the lace curtains. But the heavy folds in front of me are as mysteriously motionless and silent as if they concealed the entrance to a tomb.

"This is really too bad of you, Wayne," my friend exclaims, when I have done. "If I did not know you too well, I should think you were trying to see how much tantalizing I could bear and keep my temper. You have actually wasted three quarters of an hour of valuable time, and you have told me positively nothing."

"My dear boy," I say, with the earnestness of conviction, "I have done more for you in this three quarters of an hour, which you so begrudge me, than both of us together have done for the attainment of your happiness, and the straightening out of this inscrutable affair, in the last six months. You don't see it now, but you will by and by. Now, I want you to see how some of these details, that I have been recalling to your mind, agree with these that are presented in this document."

I have unlocked the drawer of my table while I have been speaking, and I have spread out in front of me my transcript of Sidonie's confession.

"What have you got there?" cries Lewis.

"I have got here, my boy, a very interesting nar-

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rative, as you shall see, by a writer as yet unknown to fame. Do you recognize the handwriting?"

"It is your own!"

"Same man. Author of the 'Story of the Devil' and divers other more righteous effusions as yet unpublished. Mine! No doubt of it. I wrote it. But I was merely the pen. The thought which flows through this irregular tracery had its origin in the brain of Sidonie Lamonte."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that she sat here at this table and dictated this, or substantially this, to me during a midnight visit a short time ago."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"You will comprehend that, also, presently. Allow me to read this to the end, and pray don't interrupt me until I have finished. Sidonie says, always in substance, you understand:

"'I am twenty-five years old, and I have a husband who has been the ruin of me. That man has good reason to be afraid the French police will get him. Alarmed that people might think him a Frenchman, when he reached New York he became three things which he was not — deaf and dumb and old. He must have money and he was lazy, and you see how all the rest follows. Whatever I have done of my own accord with this young American man, who met me at the theatres and sent me bouquets, I have done because I loved him. All that is not love comes from J. Tum. I could not let *him* see there was any love. I could only speak to him of what he could under-

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stand. He could understand money better than anything else. He had good brains, but he was without conscience, and he was a coward.

"'For a long time I was very happy with Ansel, and I had arranged it all so that we might be rid forever of J. Tum, when one day without a word Ansel disappeared. I was greatly disturbed, and J. Tum was more frightened still. He went in search of him, and discovered that there was another woman in a house a long way off. Then I was very jealous, and I went there and found her in his arms and I said: "Who is this woman?" He replied to me in a terrible voice: "Sister, this woman is my wife!" Then I thought it best to become his sister. He saw me again afterwards and wanted to part, but I would only say: "*Au revoir.*" In a day or two when he was not at home I made a secret visit to his wife, still as his sister. I did not know what I was proposing to do, but I discovered. Ansel had not told his wife of his uncle. She did not understand at all. He had been behaving very strangely and in his sleep had uttered words that puzzled her. She begged of me an explanation. I did not lie to her altogether. I did not plot about this. I said what came into my head. The plot made itself.

"'I told her the truth about his uncle. I said that why I had followed him to see if he were really married was because I was terrified to know that Mr. Crooke would disinherit us all, — Ansel, me his sister, and his poor old mother. I did not know what she would do then, but she wrote this letter which in two days she read to me:

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"'MY DEAR HUSBAND,—Do not think that you have concealed your unhappiness and trouble since our marriage from the eyes of your wife. I knew there was some reason, and now I know everything. You told me some in your sleep. Your sister has told me the rest. Do not blame her. I forced her to do it. And now, my darling Ansel, I have decided to go away for a little while. I am going to take a room which your sister has found for me. . . . Please, please do not follow me there unless you are sure, sure, *sure* of your own heart; and oh! do nothing that will leave a shadow of regret upon your life! I do not reproach you for anything you have done; you were silent for my own sake; but you must remember that you are unused to work, depending on your uncle's family, you and your poor mother and sister. Weigh all these things well, and do not think what my burden will be. If you find you made a mistake when you married me, I shall get along hereafter as I have done before. No one knows of it but your sister, and she will keep your secret. I will give you a week to think it all over. If at the end of that time, you wish to recall me, you may come to me. Please do not run to me as soon as you get this letter, or I shall be very angry with you. I wish to be sure that you have thought of everything, and that there can be no shadow on our after life. If I felt sure of that, I would not care for poverty at first. I am not a stranger to hardship. I might help you work, and make a place for yourself in the world. But you are not to think of this. If you have not come at two o'clock on Friday afternoon, I shall cease to expect you. I have thought it all over, and I have determined that your life shall not be sacrificed to me. If you decide to give me up, I promise you truly, Ansel, I shall never give you any trouble. If, hereafter, in God's providence, we two should meet

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anywhere on earth, I will be as a stranger to you. The marriage certificate and the ring I will send to you; you are free to do with them as you will. If you think I have acted rashly or unwisely, please, please, my darling husband, do not judge me harshly. Love only makes that which I have done possible.

AMY.'"

I have been reading this letter from the original. Lewis can hardly contain himself. He snatches the forlorn little missive out of my hand and sobs and weeps over it, kisses it, and hugs it to his heart like one insane. But even with all the disturbance that he is making, it seems impossible that he should not hear the strange echoes that seem to come from behind the lace curtains.

As for the heavy folds in front of me, not a breath disturbs them.

"Lewis," I say, "I beg you to let me go on. There is more here that will interest you."

"Be quick!" he says feverishly. "I feel as if I should choke!"

"Sidonie continues:

"'When this American girl had given me this letter to read, I saw that it would never do for Ansel to see it; so I said: "My dear, you will not have the fortitude to put this into your husband's hands. Beside, he would open it at once. You had better let me do it." "Do you think he will leave me?" she asks. "He will come to you instantly!" say I. Then I take the letter home, and a friend of mine writes another, which is enclosed in

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the same envelope after much trouble. And the next day, when I know Ansel is away, I go with the new letter to the house, and I say: "It is better, after all, to leave it on the table and come at once." I hardly think she will come, but she is brave. She meets her husband at the foot of the stairs. I am behind her. I hide myself till he has gone up; then I get her to a carriage at once, and drive her to a room that J. Tum has hired. Unknown to me my husband begins to make eyes at her, and she is in much terror of him. Then she meets Miss Mowry on the street, and that woman declares she will never leave her, for which my husband still hates Miss Mowry. Meantime a certain young man who has been sending me bouquets, and who has written the letters for me, is afraid that Ansel will come back to me; and though he greatly fears to offend me, he writes him anonymous notes, and finally tells Mr. Wayne that my husband is persecuting this American girl. This he has confessed to me, and as he did no more, I forgive him. There are others whom I shall not forgive so readily.

"'Before this happens there are strange scenes. Because I was jealous it gave me great throbs of pleasure to think what these two would endure that week! That was my revenge! I could not tell how it would end, but I knew that for this week they would suffer as I had suffered. Was it not a novel idea that they should both feel a knell in their hearts when the clock struck two on Friday? That was my idea.

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"'Then I wrote this note to the American girl: "A long farewell must be pronounce between us. My God! we must part! All is done!" That seemed like English to me, but my young friend laughed and said it would cause the whole thing to be made a gift to everybody. He made it different, like this: "Forgive me, my wife. I did not have the courage of my convictions. I have besought my uncle in vain. I love you still, but it is better as it is. You are an angel and I am a brute. Forgive me, and learn to live without me. No one in the world shall know that we have ever been man and wife. Your honor is safe." At noon on Friday, my young friend brings this letter to her. She is very pale, but she never even moans, this American girl. I am glad she is so strong. She takes off her ring, and her marriage certificate from the drawer, and they are brought to me; but I would not miss having news of her at two o'clock. At two o'clock she is not so strong. When the bell strikes she faints.

"'At two o'clock, I am with Ansel to give him the ring. When the bell strikes, he acts very strangely; he becomes, then, like a man who does not care. He laughs, and says: "Let us go to the theatre." I am afraid of him; but I go with him in the carriage which waits for me at the door. He looks at me with awful eyes in that carriage. Then he says he must stop at the hotel for a friend. I am unable to restrain him, the carriage stops, and he goes in. I wait a very long time, and he does not come back. The

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hotel opens on two streets. For long weeks I do not see him again.'"

I look up from the paper I am reading to say to Lewis:

"I don't know that we ever shall find out what you were doing between that time when you left the carriage and the time when you were found on the road at Bromberg. The clock struck two August twenty-first; the teamsters picked you up on the twenty-third. My theory is that you were not insane enough in your appearance to permit of your detention, and that you were railroading about the country in an aimless fashion. It is plain that you got off the cars at Bromberg station, and started to walk up the road. Perhaps you had forgotten to eat; at any rate, you evidently fell down from sheer exhaustion. However, it does not matter. Sidonie continues:

"'One day this American girl, in great distress, comes to my house; and suddenly J. Tum puts his arm around her, and claims her as his mistress. I am very much shocked. Naturally I have lost all my respect for her, all my belief in her. She falls upon the floor, and at that moment Ansel comes. He does not see her. He is very sick. J. Tum would run away at once. I say: "Go, then, I will stay and nurse him." Then I find that he cannot remember; I tell him a lie; he marries me. My husband, who is a coward, is always afraid that Ansel is cheating us; but, as for me, I know him too well.

"'There is no more to say except this, to Ansel: You have not understood me. I loved you always.

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You once said you loved me. You have deserted me. I cannot forgive. Therefore I shall revenge myself. SIDONIE.'"

I have finished. Lewis is breathing heavily. The strong light illumines his white, agitated face. I can plainly detect a slight disturbance behind the lace curtains. The opaque screen in front of me wears the same mysterious air of quiet. I look at my friend. He stares hopelessly at me.

"Is that all?"

"That is everything"

"Is this woman utterly without a heart?" moans Lewis. "Revenge! What does she call it?—the bitter misery the poor girl who would not injure a hair of her head has had to endure!—the torments of remorse that I am suffering! She has done that which hardly can be undone short of eternity! What more can she do?"

I see the lace curtains violently agitated. I make two steps from the table and pull them from their flimsy fastenings. Strange miracle! They fall about the head and shoulders of Amy Bueford like a bridal veil. Hesitating, trembling, frightened, blushing, too, like a bride, indeed, she stands.

"What more can she do?" I echo. "This!"

Lewis rises, quivering all over. And then from behind the Turcoman curtains comes the portentous sound of an unexpected voice:

"*Non!* Thees!"

Instinctively, I cry out to Lewis. He turns his

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head suddenly. At the same moment there are two quick, sharp reports. There is no smoke, no smell of powder, only two little holes in the curtain which has not even swayed. Lewis falls like a log where he stands.

A minute of paralysis, during which nobody stirs! Then I spring to the curtains. I meet with unforeseen obstacles. Heavy furniture piled behind them has been built into a formidable barricade. It requires my utmost strength to overthrow it, and this takes time. I reach the open window in season only to hear the sudden clash of horses' hoofs and the quick roll of wheels in the street.

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PART V. — THE NEW REGIME.

"ONLY stunned," I heard a voice say. "He turned his head just in time. The bullet grazed his temple."

I opened my eyes and saw my wife! A long, long embrace, in the silence that alone was possible to express such thoughts as ours; a flood of tears, with the mutual smiles, prophetic of the future, breaking through them; and I knew that I stood by the grave wherein my old life was buried, and looked out over the broad fields of the nobler, manlier life that was to come. In this new life I determined to be a man and fight for it. There was incentive enough now. It was no longer only necessary to have a whim to see it gratified. I was a poor man wedded to a penniless girl. I took her little hand in mine, we set out together, and I soon forgot my cynicism and my suicidal tendencies. In the workshops of this world there is little room for the fruits of *ennui*. Thanks to her inspiration and Wayne's assistance and my own resolution, I have found the humble success I have striven for.

Sidonie fired two bullets. One of them glanced off and did me no material harm. The other I shall carry about with me, the physicians tell me, as long

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as I walk the earth. Knowing Sidonie, I may thank God that I bear no deeper scars.

Five years after that episode in Wayne's apartment, I saw Fred Mulcher, whom I have always believed to be a good-hearted, though irresolute and purposeless fellow, in the custody of the law, charged with a grave offence.

"What brought you here?" I asked him.

"That woman! She would drag anybody down. I loved her. I put myself in a questionable position because she asked me to, and she ran off and left me to suffer the consequences. I don't want you to think, Mr. Lewis, that I was mixed up in that nasty attack on you. I never knew anything about it till long afterwards. She only promised that if I would help her, she would go with me to South America. I did help her. We went, and here I am."

It is with a veritable pang that I turn aside for a last word about Wayne,—generous, light-hearted, whole-souled Wayne,— to whom husband and wife owe a debt that cannot be repaid. It is not seldom cruel, this lottery of good and evil, in the midst of which we move and which we call circumstances. When I ask myself why it is that my most congenial and eligible friend is of late years fast degenerating into a confirmed old bachelor, a thousand little things which I had almost forgotten come back into my mind to force me to the unwelcome belief that Wayne met his only romance when he found and befriended the poor girl to whom Fred Mulcher called his attention, in the hour of her sorest need. It is not my wife,

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Mrs. Lewis; it is the old Amy Bueford, who for him is dead. I have sometimes thought, looking back over my life and his, that Destiny must have made a mistake. She ought to have been his wife.

Not that I could give her up for his sake. Amy Bueford! the girl whom I twice wooed, twice lost, twice made my bride! she alone makes life what it is to me.

I have kept the poor little letter that Sidonie returned to Wayne, as a priceless treasure ever since that night. It nearly broke my heart to hear it read, and to think of all that the brave young wife who wrote it had borne, unaided and alone. With what pain I have reviewed the horrible part I innocently played in her life after she left me first, hardly yet a bride! How unmercifully, God forgive me! I added to the fires in which she suffered her self-imposed martyrdom!

I often recall one sentence which she uttered in the midst of the torture that I so unwittingly inflicted: "Ansel, I have kept my promise; I shall always keep it!" Kept her promise! Oh, my long-suffering and patient wife, you were tried as the believers of old were tried, and your supreme fortitude never deserted you. It makes no difference that I did not know then the pain I gave you. It was through my cowardice and my weakness that the horrible mistake that nearly wrecked both our lives became possible, and to the day of my death that little sentence will always haunt me as a pain and a reproach — "I have kept my promise."

"To see me so happy with you," my wife said to

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me one day, "nobody would ever think that I had spent long months in which almost my sole thought was to blot your dear face out of my heart, to learn to hate and despise you as you seemed to deserve, and that on the morning of the day you were shot, I said to myself, 'The old love is dead.'"

"Oh, my darling!" I cried, "how could you have found strength to go through all that you had to endure? How could you have had the courage to leave me at the first?"

She looked up into my face with a sad smile. "You are fond of making an angel of me, Ansel," she said, "but I am very human, after all. If I had believed you would have deserted me, I could not have written that letter. I was selfish; I was jealous of all other things that prevented me from being first in your thoughts. I believed it would appeal to all your manhood; that you would come at once and tell me everything, and love me better than ever. And then every morning when you did not come I said to myself: How much he loves me; he longs to fly to me, but he is afraid he will disappoint me if he comes too soon. He wants me to know that he has thoroughly faced the situation. And then, Ansel, it was wounded pride, that most ignoble of all feminine incentives, that supported me. Pique, disappointed vanity, held out an arm to save me when I would have fallen, and you came and saw how I had continued to stand, and cried out, — Lo! a heroine!"

THE END.

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